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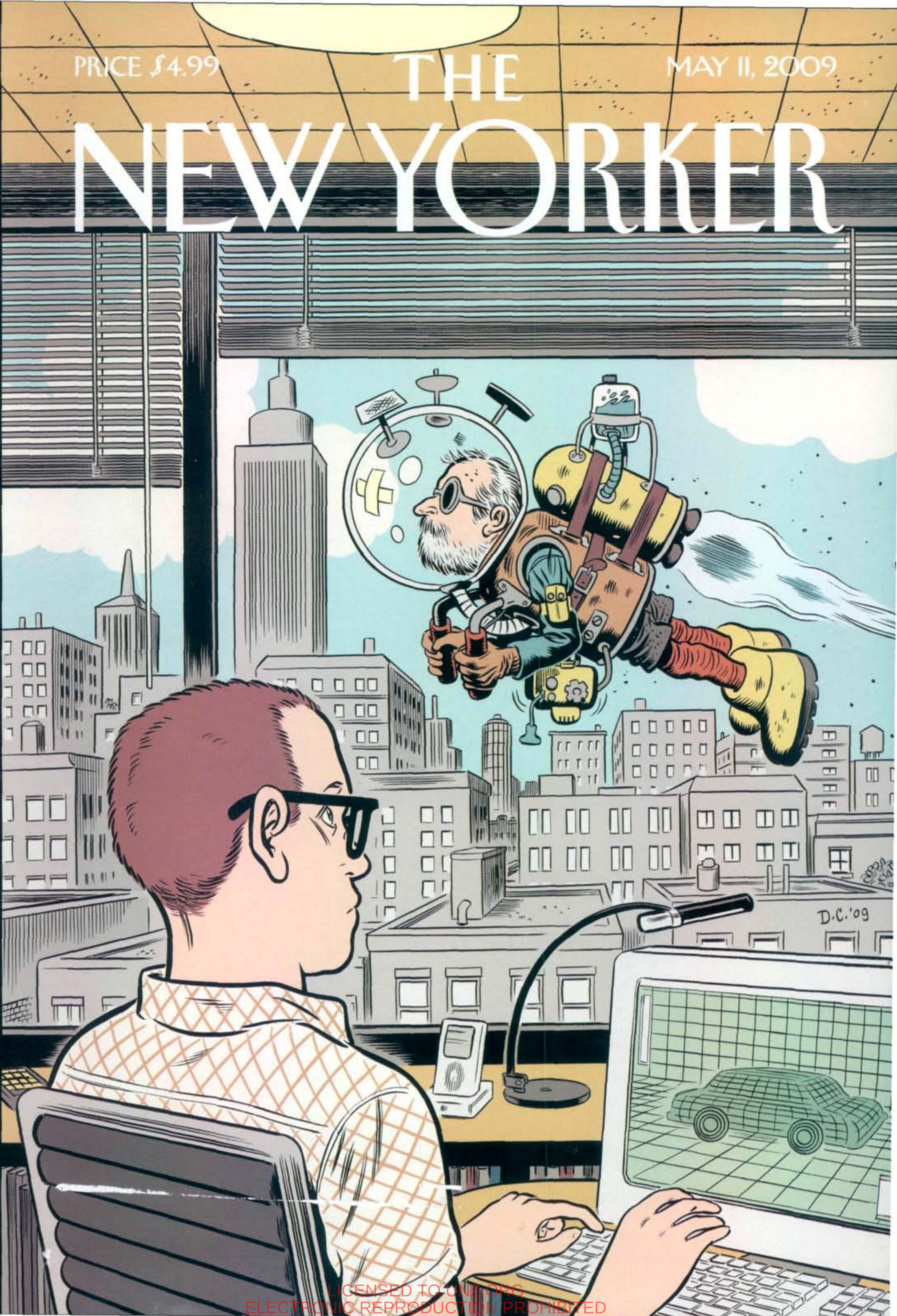
THE NEW YORKER

MAY 11, 2009



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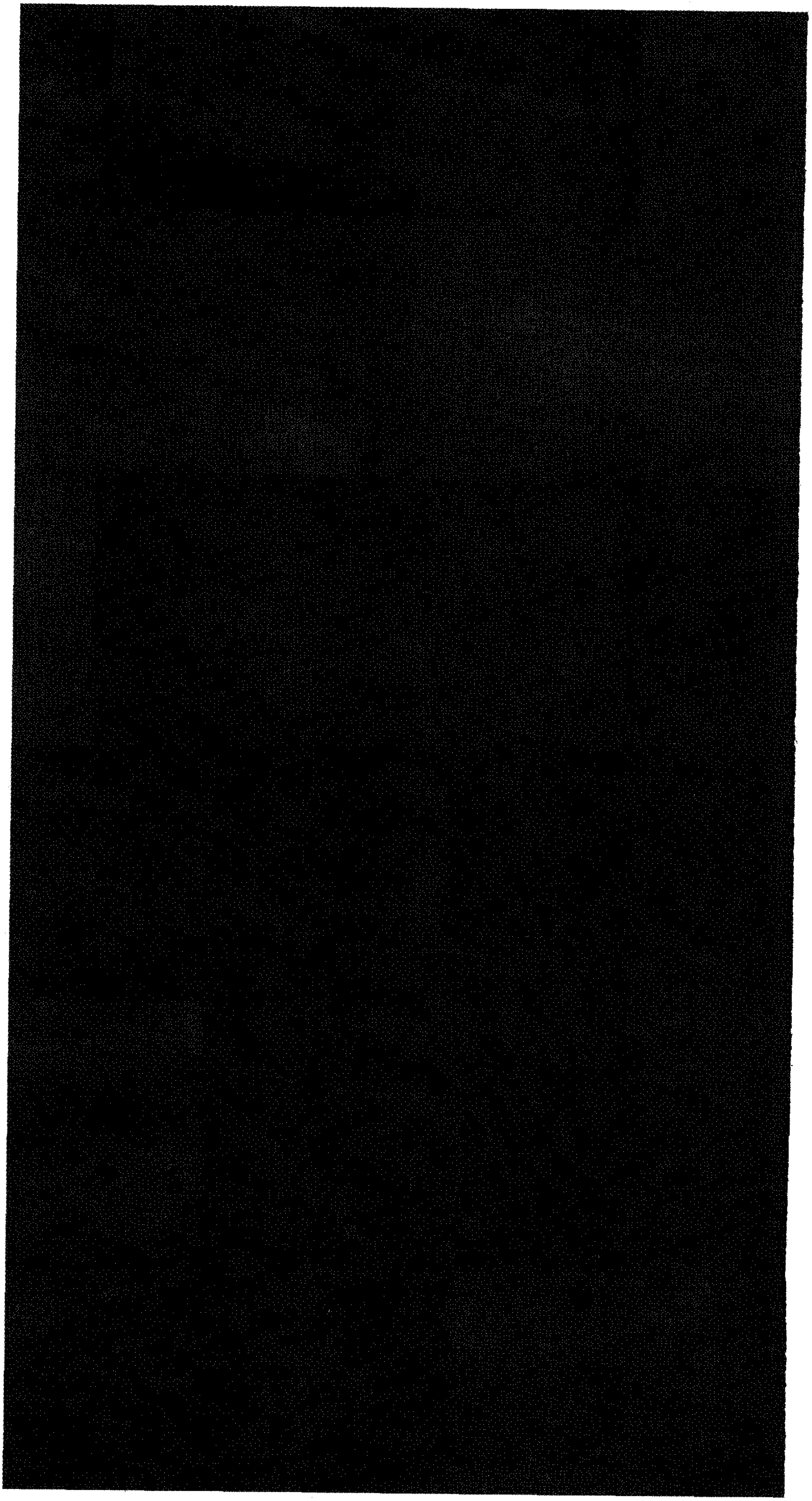

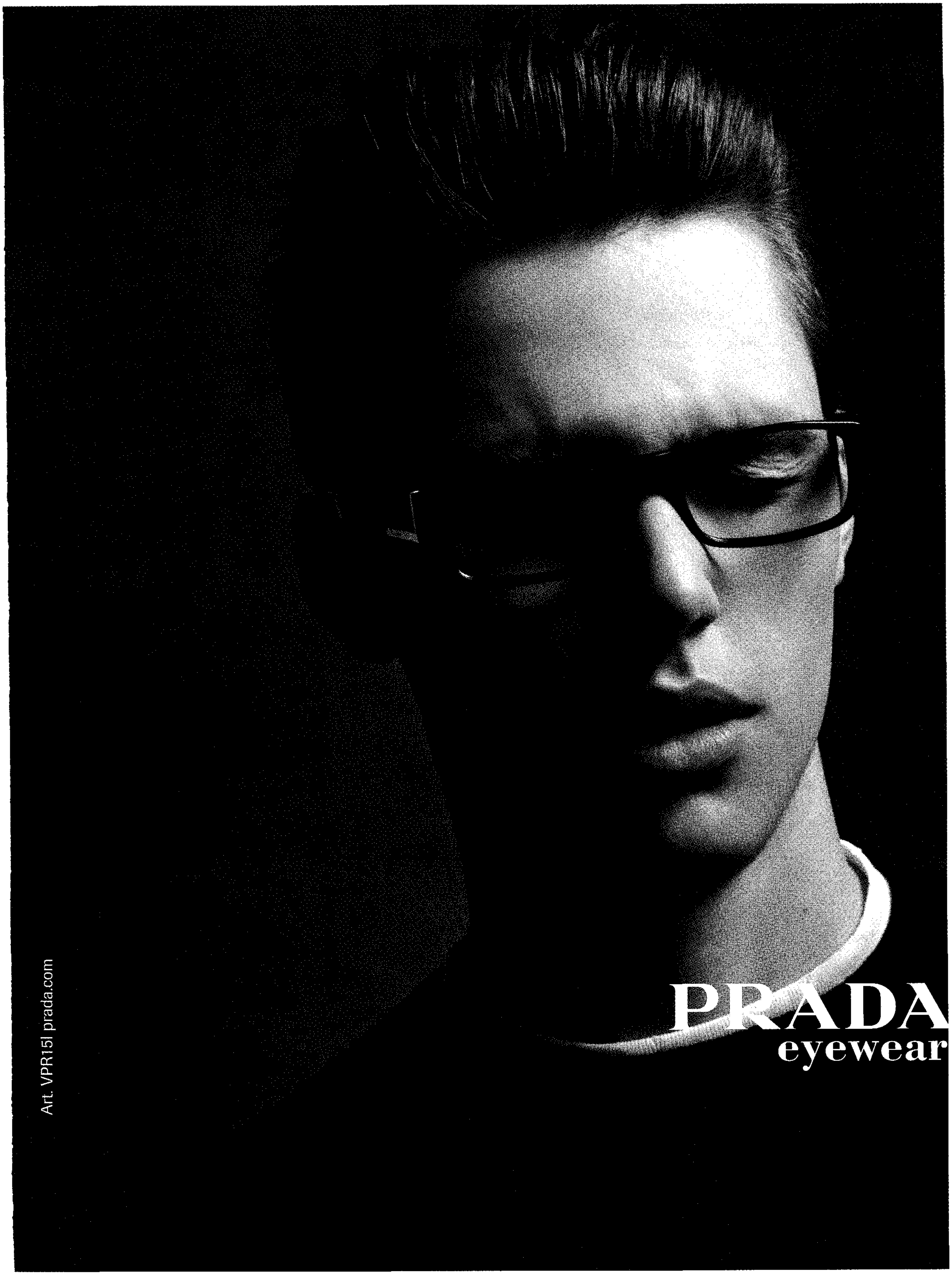
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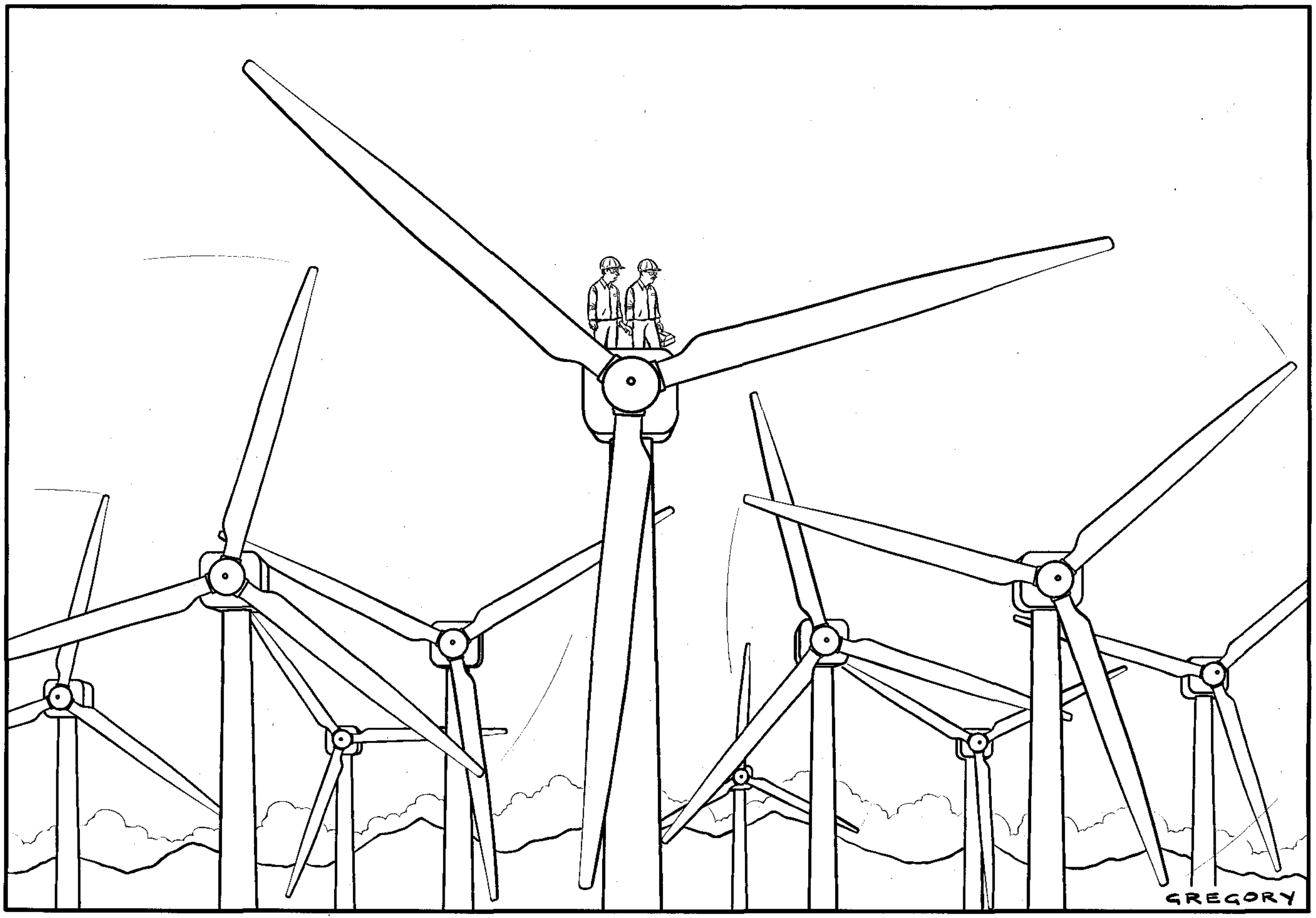

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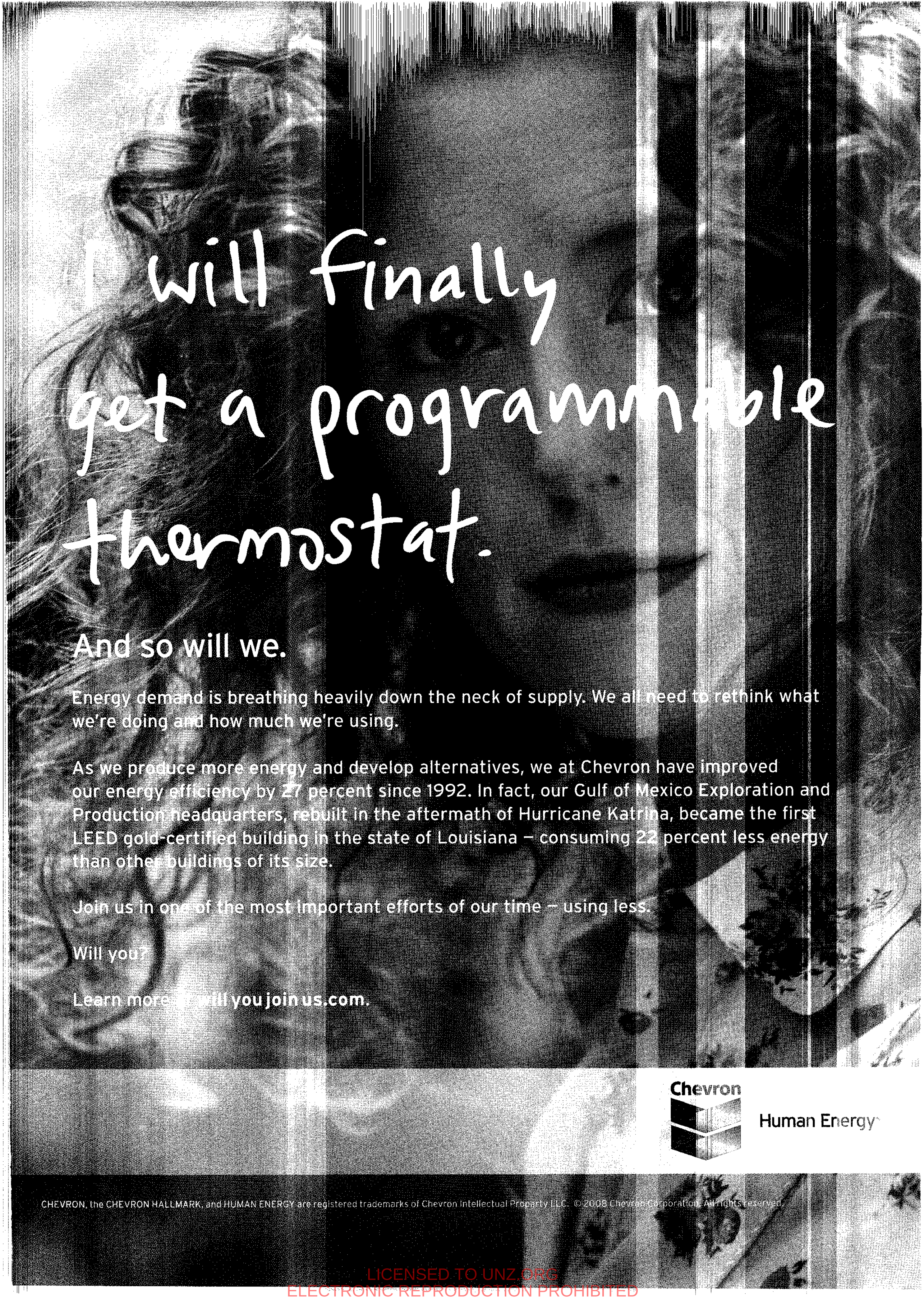

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CONTRIBUTORS

Malcolm Gladwell ("How David Beats Goliath," p. 40) has written three books, including "Outliers: The Story of Success," which was published in November.

Philip Gourevitch (Comment, p. 33) is the editor of *The Paris Review*. His latest book, "The Ballad of Abu Ghraib," a collaboration with Errol Morris, is just out in paperback.

Adam Gopnik ("The Fifth Blade," p. 50), a staff writer, has published several books, including, most recently, "Angels and Ages: A Short Book About Darwin, Lincoln, and Modern Life."

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John Colapinto ("Brain Games," p. 76) is a staff writer and the author of "As Nature Made Him" and "About the Author."

Heather McHugh (Poem, p. 80), a poet and an essayist, will publish a new collection of poems, "Upgraded to Serious," in September.

Evan Osnos ("The Long Shot," p. 88), a *New Yorker* writer based in China, writes the blog Letter from China, on newyorker.com. He is working on a book about foreigners in China.

J. G. Ballard (Fiction, p. 96) died in April. His fictional autobiographies include "Empire of the Sun" and "The Kindness of Women." "The Complete Stories of J. G. Ballard" is due out in September.

Judith Thurman (Books, p. 98) is the author of "Cleopatra's Nose: 39 Varieties of Desire."

Dan Clowes (Cover), a cartoonist, has published seven graphic novels, including "Ice Haven."

Adam Kirsch (Books, p. 104) is a senior editor at *The New Republic* and a columnist for Nextbook.org. "Invasions" is his most recent book of poems.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Philip Gourevitch takes readers' questions about torture. / Audio: *Ryan Lizza, Hendrik Hertzberg*, and *Dorothy Wickenden* on the Political Scene podcast; *Tom Shone* on J. G. Ballard. / Video: *Evan Osnos* on Jia Zhangke; *Richard Brody's* DVD of the week. / Live dispatches and video from The New Yorker Summit. / More blogs: *James Surowiecki* on the economy, *Amy Davidson* on the day's news, *Sasha Frere-Jones* on pop music, plus the Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, and more. / The Book Club reads Geoff Dyer. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.

THE MAIL

THE FUTURE OF PLASTIC

I wish that John Colapinto had engaged readers more thoroughly in a meaningful dialogue about the impact of throwaway plastic waste on the marine environment and, ultimately, human health, instead of focussing on a tabloidesque, fictitious drama between David de Rothschild and me ("Message in a Bottle," April 6th). There is no drama, no rift. Our respective voyages highlight the urgency of addressing the rapid accumulation of synthetic chemicals in the world's oceans. Plastiki is highlighting innovations in the reuse of post-consumer plastic, what many of us consider to be waste. JUNKraft defends cultural change—both producer responsibility and consumer incentives to eliminate plastic products designed to be thrown away. After three voyages into the Eastern Garbage Patch, and five years as a scientist and educator, I believe that throwaway plastics are too wasteful to value in modern society. The age of throwaway plastic must end.

Marcus Eriksen
Director of Research and Education
Algalita Marine Research Foundation
Long Beach, Calif.

Plastic bottles may represent the "cradle-to-grave mentality," but at least, as Colapinto's article points out, we can make things out of them such as speed bumps. Thus it might make sense if David de Rothschild recycled a discarded fibreglass boat, which has to be dumped in a landfill, and refurbished it to emit no carbon emissions. He could still use lots of material made from recycled plastic bottles: the crew's clothing and his boat's furniture, for instance. In doing so, he would send a big green message to the people with big carbon-emitting yachts.

Elizabeth Cornell
New York City

TWIN TALES

As an identical twin and a writer, I was pleased that Rebecca Mead ("Couplet," April 6th) offered a nuanced investigation of how the twinship of Matthew and Michael Dickman informs their poetry, instead of succumbing to the cloying fascination that twins more typically inspire. As with the Dickmans' verbal début, the first words my twin and I spoke were in our own made-up language: English was our second tongue. Twin communication, though, begins in utero and, as the novelist John Barth (fraternal twin to Jill) points out, in a 1982 essay, continues on a nonverbal level "before speech and beyond speech." Barth posits that twins may regard language as necessary "for dealing with the outsiders; between ourselves, we have little need of it. One might reasonably therefore expect a twin who becomes a storyteller never to take language for granted." It's clear the Dickmans don't.

Jacqueline White
Minneapolis, Minn.

TAKING BETS

Alec Wilkinson takes the torch from ESPN ("World Series of Poker"), glorifying the eccentricities, gamesmanship, and mathematical genius of poker's élite players ("What Would Jesus Bet?," March 30th). Unfortunately, neither ESPN nor Wilkinson appreciates the plight of fledgling players maxing out credit cards at online tables while trying to become the next Chris (Jesus) Ferguson. Many of us enjoy a periodic game of poker—it's social and at times exhilarating. After a game among friends, one is liable to go home frustrated and lighter in the wallet, but not broke. However, that's literally what can and does happen to some individuals on Internet poker sites. Gambling regulations are crafted to curb adverse social consequences. Instead of splitting hairs about whether poker is a game of skill or a game of chance, perhaps we should advocate strict laws regulating all forms of Internet gambling.

David S. Kirschenbaum
San Francisco, Calif.

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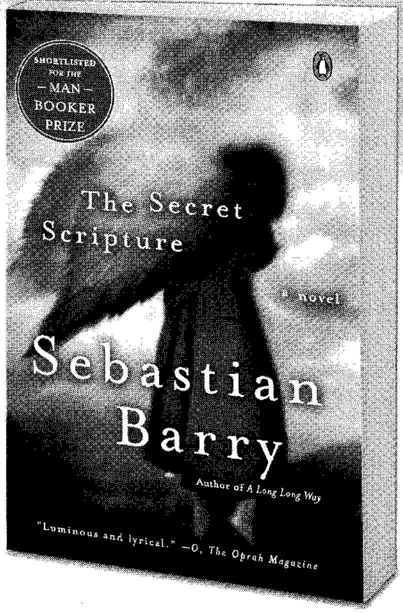
the Man Booker Prize

"A profound experience."
—Margot Livesey,
The Boston Globe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The Secret Scripture
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Sebastian Barry
Author of A Long Long Way
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—O, The Oprah Magazine

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"Language of surpassing beauty."
—The New York Times

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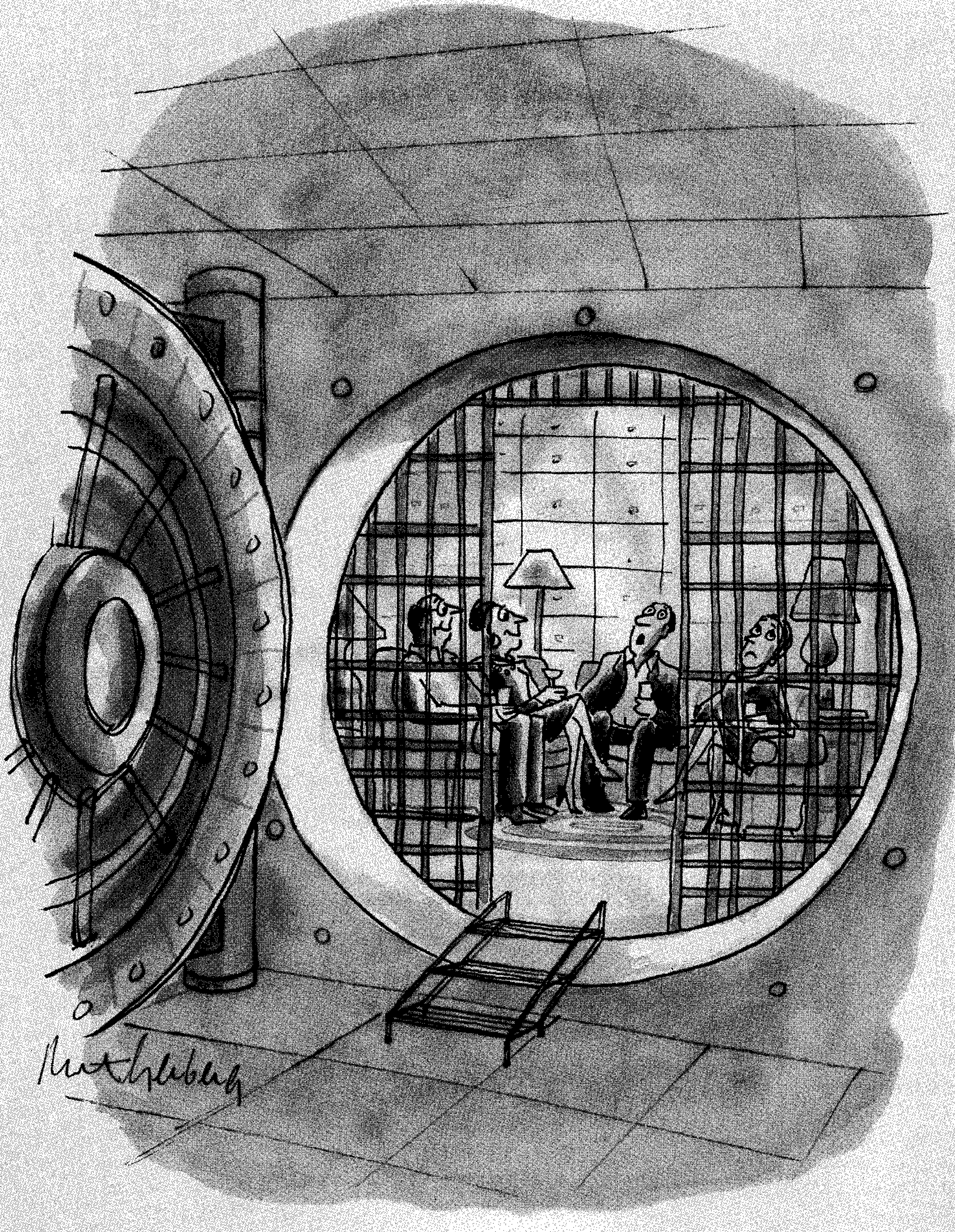

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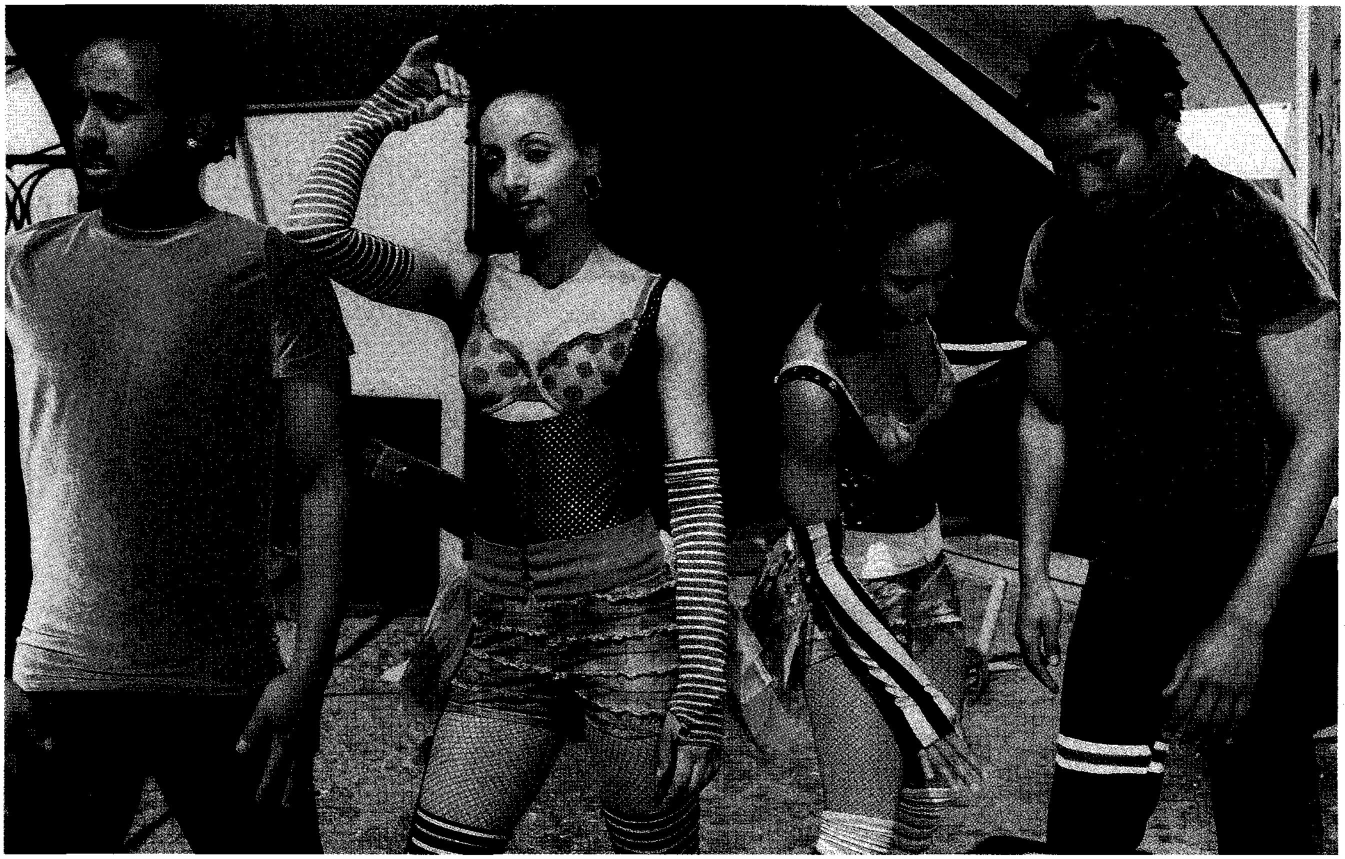

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
COUNTRY BOARDS

The "Americas Off Broadway" series at 59E59 presents five acclaimed productions from regional theatres across the country. The roster includes "The Dishwashers," by Morris Panych, from the Chester Theatre Company in Massachusetts; "Fubar," a drama from Washington, D.C.,'s Project Y, by Karl Gajdusek (Showtime's "Dead Like Me"); and "Pure Confidence," by Carlyle Brown, from Minneapolis's Mixed Blood Theatre Company. (See page 12.)

NIGHT LIFE
COLD CUTS

The Deli, a music magazine and Web site dedicated to the local indie-rock scene, recently surveyed its readership to find the most highly regarded bands around. The results are in, and many of the acts, including Chairlift, the Crystal Stilts, the Lisps, and Lowery, are appearing in its Best of NYC Festival at venues in Brooklyn and Manhattan. (See page 15.)

ART
POP-NOTCH

A Brobdingnagian bacon-lettuce-and-tomato sandwich, a soft-sculpture toilet, and a nearly four-foot-wide plate of French fries—all made out of vinyl—are among the Pop-art icons in the Whitney's exhibition "Claes Oldenburg: Early Sculpture, Drawings, and Happenings Films." (See page 16.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
DENKOLOGY

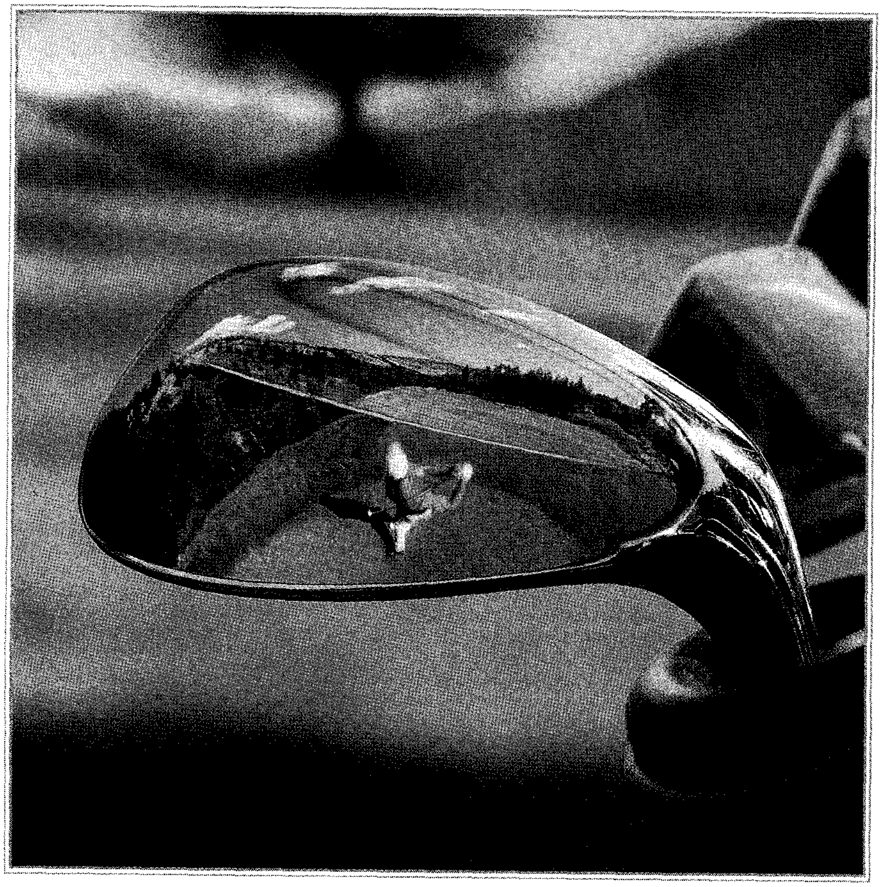
The fast-rising New York pianist Jeremy Denk, whose recital of sonatas by Ives and Beethoven at Zankel Hall in November was an unalloyed triumph, performs Bach's Goldberg Variations at Symphony Space this week. (See page 22.)

MOVIES
PAST, TENSE

The Hungarian director Miklós Jancsó—who is in his late eighties and still at work—made his name in the nineteen-sixties and seventies with historical epics that braved Iron Curtain-era censorship by mounting intricate analyses of distant events by means of meticulous camerawork and elaborate staging. The Film Society of Lincoln Center offers a weekend of these early classics. (See page 27.)

Performers in the UniverSoul Circus. Photograph by Brian Finke.

IF ONLY WE HAD AN ECONOMIC CLIMATE WITH 300 DAYS OF SUNSHINE.



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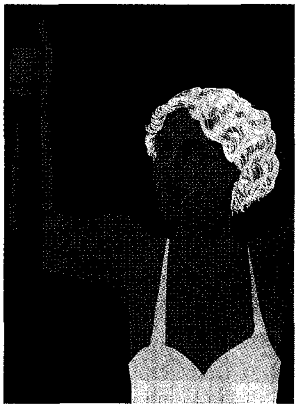
Beaver Creek. *Not exactly roughing it.*

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
A MAN'S WORLD

It's common knowledge that Shakespeare's plays were first performed with all-male casts; it wasn't until around 1660 that a female actor was used. Since then, for the most part, girls play girls, and boys are in pursuit of them. There have been few contemporary masters who have usurped this golden rule. The French writer Jean Genet preferred that male actors perform his play "The Maids," even though it's about women; many have attributed this wish to Genet's perversity. Might the same critics make a similar noise about the brilliant British-born director Edward Hall and his all-male company Propeller? Yes, given the relative conservatism of the times, especially when it comes to our P.C.-ridden theatre arts. Hall, who brings Watermill Theatre and Propeller's "Merchant of Venice" to BAM May 6-17, has striven to make Shakespeare new. He's done this less by returning to Shakespeare's first casting rule than by underplaying, and overplaying, the theatricality of the female parts, in order to return Shakespeare to his essence.

—*Hilton Als*



RACHEL DOMM

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AMERICAN HWANGAP
Lloyd Suh's new comedy, presented by the Play Company and Ma-Yi Theatre, centers on a Korean family in West Texas celebrating its patriarch's sixtieth birthday. Trip Cullman directs. Previews begin May 9. (The Wild Project, 195 E. 3rd St. 212-352-3101.)

AMERICAS OFF BROADWAY
At 59E59, this festival culls plays produced by American regional companies, beginning with Morris Panych's "The Dishwashers," directed by Byam Stevens, from the Chester Theatre Company, in Massachusetts. Previews begin May 8. (59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

BINIBON
The composer Elliott Sharp and Jack Womack wrote this new play with music, about the murder of Richard Adan, who was stabbed by the literary darling Jack Abbott outside an East Village restaurant in 1981. Tea Alagic directs, at the Kitchen. May 6-9. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11.)

BLOODY BLOODY ANDREW JACKSON: THE CONCERT VERSION
As part of the Public LAB series, Alex Timbers, in association with Les Freres Corbusier, wrote and directs this musical, a satirical look at the seventh President. Michael Friedman wrote the music and lyrics. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

CORALINE
Stephin Merritt, of the Magnetic Fields, wrote the music and lyrics for this musical, and David Greenspan wrote the book, based on the novel by Neil Gaiman, about a bored, lonely girl who steps into a fantasy world. Jayne Houdyshell stars in the title role. Leigh Silverman directs the MCC Theatre production. Previews begin May 7. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

FINDING THE ROOSTER
Terence Patrick Hughes wrote and directs this play, set in 1965, about the effect of the Vietnam War on a suburban New England family. In previews. Opens May 8. (13th Street Repertory, 50 W. 13th St. 212-675-6677.)

GROUNDSWELL
The New Group presents a thriller by Ian Bruce, in which two South African lodge employees hatch a get-rich-quick scheme involving nearby diamond mines. Larry Bryggman, David Lansbury, and Souleymane Sy Savane star; Scott Elliott directs. In previews. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE HIROSHIMA PROJECT
This monthlong event includes readings of American and Japanese plays and Steven Okazaki's documentary "White Light/Black Rain." Chiori Miyagawa's new play, "I Have Been to Hiroshima Mon Amour," depicts two love stories set in Hiroshima. Opens May 8. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE
At BAM's Harvey Theatre, the British companies Watermill Theatre and Propeller present the Shakespeare comedy, directed by Edward Hall. Opens May 6. (651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

A MORE PERFECT UNION
Epic Theatre Ensemble presents the première of a new comedy by Vern Thiessen, about two Supreme Court Justices who must overcome their differences. In previews. Opens May 12. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

OFFICES
The world première of three new one-act comedies about the workplace by Ethan Coen, directed by Neil Pepe. The cast includes F. Murray Abraham and Aya Cash. In previews. Opens May 7. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

SHELLS
At Joe's Pub on May 10, Roslyn Hart performs her serial one-woman show (written by Hart and Nick Chase), about a boozing J.P. Morgan executive who moonlights as a cabaret performer. (425 Lafayette St. 212-539-8777.)

VIEUX CARRÉ
Austin Pendleton directs the Tennessee Williams play. Previews begin May 12. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

WHY SOLO PERFORMANCE MATTERS: A MANIFESTO
The "SoloNOVA" arts festival opens with a keynote address by Mike Daisey, winner of terraNOVA Collective's Solo Artist of the Year award, on May 6. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

ACCENT ON YOUTH
Manhattan Theatre Club presents Samson Raphaelson's 1934 comedy, in which a successful playwright struggling with his latest work becomes inspired by his secretary and produces a Broadway hit. David Hyde Pierce and Charles Kimbrough star; Daniel Sullivan directs. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

CHRISTMAS IS MILES AWAY
At the Connelly, Babel Theatre Project presents this drama by Chloe Moss, which follows three English friends as they grow apart. Geordie Broadwater directs. (220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101.)

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS
Eugene O'Neill's 1924 drama, about a woman who has an affair with her stepson, transfers from the Goodman Theatre. Brian Dennehy, Carla Gugino, and Pablo Schreiber star; Robert Falls directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

EVERYDAY RAPTURE
Dick Scanlan and Sherie Rene Scott, who also stars, wrote this coming-of-age story, about a Mennonite girl who goes to Manhattan. Michael Mayer directs. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

EXIT THE KING
King Berenger the First (Geoffrey Rush), a recalcitrant man-child more than four centuries old, is dying. The older of his two wives, Queen Marguerite (Susan Sarandon), can accept what the King's beloved, younger wife, Queen Marie (Lauren Ambrose), cannot: that death is life's first cousin. Written by the Romanian-French playwright Eugène Ionesco in 1962, brilliantly directed by Neil Armfield, and lovingly and well translated by Armfield and Rush, the play is as much about performance as anything else. Rush and Ambrose are especially astonishing at performing little pirouettes around Ionesco's concrete poetry. The joke for Ionesco, Armfield, and the actors is that they know their world is artificial. What's real is their attempt to convince us otherwise. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/6/09.) (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

GALILEO / THE SCIENCE PLAYS
Milk Can Theatre Company performs two plays in repertory: "Galileo," Bertolt Brecht's meditation on the mathematician's philosophies (directed by Julie Fei-Fan Balzer), and "The Science Plays," a compendium of short works spanning topics from Archimedes to the future. (Urban Stages, 259 W. 30th St. 212-868-4444.)

GOD OF CARNAGE
In Christopher Hampton's excellent translation, the French playwright Yasmina Reza's dark and hilarious farce (elegantly directed by Matthew Warchus) has been relocated from Paris to the comfortable upper-middle-class environs of Cobble Hill, Brooklyn. Henry, the aggrieved eleven-year-old son of Michael and Veronica Novak (James Gandolfini and Marcia Gay Harden), has had two teeth knocked out by Benjamin, the son of Alan and Annette Raleigh (Jeff Daniels and Hope Davis). Gandolfini, who brilliantly manages his character's arc from genteel to goniff, earns every moment of Reza's fun, and Hope Davis, as Annette, is an elegant package of repressed nastiness. In ninety minutes of sustained mayhem, Reza wipes the masks of sang-froid off her whole monstrous regiment and demonstrates just how thin a line lies between civility and barbarity. (3/30/09) (Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Of the ten plays in August Wilson's Century Cycle, this one (under the deft direction of Bartlett Sher) was his favorite and his masterpiece. In 1911, the haunted, taciturn Herald Loomis (Chad L. Coleman) wanders into a Pittsburgh boarding house, having endured twin traumas: he was dragooned into slavery for seven years by a white plantation owner, Joe Turner, and he was abandoned by his wife, for whom he has been searching, with his now eleven-year-old daughter, Zonia (Amari Rose Leigh), for four years. At a time just after Plessy v. Ferguson—according to which African-Americans were considered "separate but equal"—the separation, for the boarding-house residents, is spectacular: separation from history, from family, from education, from capital, from self. At the end of the play, the air is suddenly flecked with gold, a halo of sorts, meant to indicate Loomis's resurrection, but it also represents the shine of Wilson's œuvre, "a wail and a whelp of joy" that was his hard-won and gorgeous song. (4/27/09) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

MARY STUART

The excellent support of John Benjamin Hickey, Chandler Williams, and Nicholas Woodeson as backbiting Tudor courtiers in Friedrich Schiller's 1800 play (in an outstanding new version by Peter Oswald) gives a special wallop to the evening's main event: a showdown between the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots (the strapping Janet McTeer), imprisoned for plotting against the Protestant throne, and Queen Elizabeth I (the fine-boned Harriet Walter), who has her cousin's butt in a sling but may want her head as well. McTeer and Walter are alert and articulate; they parse every nuance of every word. As McTeer's Mary struggles to contain her fury, Walter's Queen hides a vicious heart behind her starchiness. The director, Phyllida Lloyd, imposes a dashing urgency on the events: from the first beat, the play explodes before us. The political pragmatism may be predictable; the theatrical pyrotechnics with which it's displayed are exceptional. (4/27/09) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

En Vogue reunites at the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill.

9 TO 5: THE MUSICAL

Dolly Parton's musicalization of the movie that put a funny mirror up to women's lib captures the pep, if not the grit, of the original. Stephanie J. Block, Megan Hilty, and Allison Janney play the three beleaguered secretaries who kidnap their chauvinistic boss (the perfectly cast Marc Kudisch); all are good, though Hilty, who has the hardest job—stepping into Dolly's boots—beams the brightest. Joe Mantello's production pops like bubble gum, bouncing from one dance-filled fantasy sequence to another. You may wonder, though, why Parton's songs sound so much like the synthesized scores of shows like "Legally Blonde" and "The Wedding Singer." In the end, this musical is something that Parton certainly isn't: generic. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE PHILANTHROPIST

Written as a response to Molière's "The Misanthrope," Christopher Hampton's 1970 comedy, directed by David Grindley, has at its core a character who infuriates his peers not by being acerbic but by being agreeable and uncritical. Philip (Matthew Broderick), a professor of philology, is interested in words—he can anagram phrases on command—but admits to being inexpert at what happens when people put them all together. He is as politely accommodating to the advances of an aggressive student as he is unruffled by reports of the assassination of the Prime Minister and much of the Cabinet; his lovely, lively fiancée (Anna Madeley) calls him "bland" and compares him to a pudding. Broderick's familiar comic techniques are a mixed blessing here: his Philip is gentle, amusing, and befuddled, at once recognizable and impossible to believe. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

PUPPET KAFKA

The puppet-theatre ensemble Drama of Works presents what it calls a "speculation" on the life and works of Franz Kafka (with text by B. Walker Sampson, directed by Gretchen van Lente), interweaving various seemingly random events from the author's tragically short life with scenes from his masterpiece "The Metamorphosis." The result is an odd cluster of absurdist vignettes, well acted and sprinkled with the occasional tenderly affecting moment, but whose purpose and power feel just out of reach. One could argue that this mysterious, stunted quality is in keeping with the notoriously cryptic oeuvre of its subject, but the preciousness that the puppetry brings to the material doesn't quite pair harmoniously with the intense darkness and slippery humor that characterizes Kafka's imagination. (HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101. Through May 10.)

THE SINGING FOREST

Craig Lucas's new play brings together a web of shrinks, mothers, and ex-lovers in contemporary New York, each of whom has a circuitous connection with the others. The beginning scenes are lucid and peculiar, but as the play's three acts progress they become increasingly preposterous, building to door-slamming farce one moment and then flashing back to Nazi horrors the next. Lucas's script has a buzzy, intelligent humor, but it's weighed down by too many contrivances, which the director, Mark Wing-Davey, can only barely contain. With Jonathan Groff as an actor posing as a reclusive millionaire and Olympia Dukakis as an alcoholic grandma who works a phone-sex line while repressing memories of Occupied Vienna—it's just that kind of play. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

SOPHISTRY

South Ark Stage revives this 1993 comedy by Jonathan Marc Sherman, about a group of New England college students who are affected by the sexual-harassment accusations made against their philosophy professor. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

33 VARIATIONS

A musicology lecture disguised as an intellectual detective story within an emotional melodrama, written and directed by Moisés Kaufman. "I need to know what he saw in this waltz," says the play's dogged shamus, Dr. Katherine Brandt (Jane Fonda), a classical-music scholar who is in a race to finish her monograph before she succumbs to a motor-neuron disease. Kaufman's scenes may be clumsy, but the interplay between the stories of Beethoven and Brandt is elegant. The excitement of Beethoven's visionary genius doesn't extend to Kaufman's plot, however, whose simplistic shorthand is more tele-visionary. The play marks Fonda's return to the Broadway stage after forty-six years, but the role is no test of her emotional range. Her presence—with its curious amalgam of alertness and standoffishness—is a neat bit of typecasting; Fonda provides a sort of scaffolding of will power and disdain that props up the ambitious Brandt. (3/23/09) (O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

WAITING FOR GODOT

Roundabout Theatre Company presents Samuel Beckett's masterpiece, starring Bill Irwin (as Vladimir) and Nathan Lane (as Estragon). Also with John Goodman (Pozzo) and John Glover (Lucky). Anthony Page directs. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

Also Playing

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY: Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLITHE SPIRIT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **IMPRESSIONISM:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through May 10. **IRENA'S VOW:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **JOHN LITHGOW: STORIES BY HEART:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE NORMAN CONQUESTS:** Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **REASONS TO BE PRETTY:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **ROCK OF AGES:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE TOXIC AVENGER:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—May 7-8: Starting in the eighties, Philadelphia's **Boyz II Men** developed a brand of mellifluous vocal harmony spliced with amorous R. & B. Icing their earnest paeans to the fair sex with lots of vocal theatrics, the quartet scored a string of successful singles in the early to mid-nineties such as "I'll Make Love to You" and the plangent "End of the Road," the latter becoming one of the biggest hits of all time. May 10: Proof that all-original-member reunions aren't simply for hirsute heavy-metal bands, the self-styled "Funky Divas" of **En Vogue** return for a special Mother's Day show. A Grammy-winning force to be reckoned with in their nine-

JACOB WEINSTEIN

ties heyday, En Vogue was responsible for several of the decade's biggest singles, such as "My Lovin' (You're Never Gonna Get It)" and "Free Your Mind," adding sassy swagger to accomplished vocal harmonies. May 11-13: Last year's movie "Cadillac Records" was a fanciful reimagining of the beginnings of Chess Records, in Chicago, telling the stories of its co-founder Leonard Chess and some of its early stars, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter, and Chuck Berry. It chugged along engagingly until Beyoncé entered, as **Etta James.** Her performance skewed the story—and the singing—in a particularly unappealing Hollywood direction, but the legendary R. & B. belter is here to set the record straight, at last.

CITY WINERY
143 Varick St. (212-608-0555)—May 6: When **John Doe** and X, his California punk band, slashed onto the scene, in 1977, there was always the sense that the group was just as much about art as it was about anger, maybe even a bit more so. In the ensuing years, Doe, who has a vibrant baritone, has also proved to be an adept practitioner of rockabilly and balladry. His latest album, "Country Club," recorded with the **Sadies,** who join him here, features songs by Haggard, Cash, and Kristofferson and one he co-wrote with his X cohort Exene Cervenka.

THE DELI'S BEST OF NYC FESTIVAL
The magazine and Web site presents the crème de la crème of local acts, with the plaintive folkish rock of **Lowry** at Southpaw, on May 6; the dreamy garage pop of the **Crystal Stilts** at the Bell House, on May 8; the atmospheric songs of **Chairlift,** also at the Bell House, on May 10; and the **Lisps,** who are performing an original musical about a Union soldier in the Civil War who wants to be a science-fiction writer, at Joe's Pub, on May 9. The opening acts for all these shows merit just as much attention as the headliners. Taken as a whole, the festival offers a crash course in the state of the New York City rock scene. (For more information, visit www.thedelimagazine.com.)

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—May 9: The bedraggled torchbearers of a new generation of heavy-metal bands, Atlanta's **Mastodon** have, over the course of four impenetrably riff-laden releases, restored the oft-maligned genre's bad name. Their feverishly ornate lyrics and stentorian sonic wallop have been championed by no less than the metal overlords Metallica. Their latest album, "Crack the Skye," stands to crush all in its path, even if it does so in a surprisingly hummable way.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—May 12: **Ramblin' Jack Elliott** is an authentic American cowboy—from the badlands of Brooklyn. In 1946, at age fifteen, he ran away to join the rodeo. He hooked up with Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly, among others, and became practically synonymous with the folk scene in the Village during the sixties. His latest album, "A Stranger Here," focusses on the blues side of his musical capabilities. The "Ramblin'" in his name refers as much to his garrulous nature as it does to his travels. In addition to his great music, you'll hear some great storytelling.

HOUSING WORKS BOOKSTORE CAFÉ
126 Crosby St. (212-334-3324)—May 8: The café's "Live from Home" music series presents a benefit show featuring the elfin Icelander **Björk** and the Brooklyn locals the **Dirty Projectors.** Together, they will perform a suite of new music for five voices composed by the Projectors' talented front man, David Longstreth, as well as various pieces from the Projectors' canon.

LIVING ROOM
154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7237)—The imaginative singer-songwriter **Katell Keineg** was born in Wales, raised in Brittany, and has spent a great deal of time in New York City and Dublin. She has a beautiful and wild voice that seems to carry in it every mile she has ever travelled. Keineg recently completed a new album that she's shopping around, and she offers a preview of it here on May 9.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—May 8: The underground hero **Mike Watt** brings his Missingmen trio to New York to record and perform Watt's new punk opera, "Hyphenated-Man." In 1980, the bassist, a Navy brat from San Pedro, California, founded the pioneering punk trio the Minutemen with a home-town friend, the guitarist D. Boon. The group's undefinable songwriting merged hardcore, jazz, folk, and rock with artful political lyrics, and the band was widely admired. Boon died in a van accident in 1985, cutting the group's rising career short and leaving Watt devastated. Despite his initial withdrawal from music after his friend's death, Watt persevered, and for the past twenty-some years he's toured and recorded in a vast array of contexts, from filling the bass chair in the Stooges to performing with Dos, a long-running duo with the former Black Flag bassist Kira. Mike Watt and the Missingmen, one of his best projects, features noisy, passionate songs and two inspired sidemen, Tom Watson on guitar and Raul Morales on drums. Staying true to his hard-working ethos, Watt and his cohorts are also in town for a mid-tour recording of their opera, which he describes as "like one big song with thirty parts." May 9: The **Giraffes,** a brash gang of guitar-brandishing Lotharios from Brooklyn, specialize in a high-volume amalgam of hard rock, punk, and stoner metal (with a swaggering dash of surf guitars thrown in). The title of their latest album, "Prime Motivator," is an allusion to the lead singer Aaron Lazar's implanted heart defibrillator. May 10: The Seattle sludge-masters **Big Business** have expanded into a three-piece to round out their low-end sonic assault weapon. After recent tours with the Melvins, they return with their vicious hybrid, recalling the pounding brutality of early-nineties metal, grunge, and noise rock.

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—May 9: The **Lucky Dragons** are a pair of open-minded Californians who produce a contemporary variation on psychedelia through the use of digital manipulation. The group was a part of the 2008 Whitney Biennial, and it has appeared at PS1 and the Pompidou Center (along with other cultural institutions).

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
The institute closes its current season with a visit by **Sing Sing,** a troupe of indigenous performers from Papua New Guinea, West Papua, and Australia (see Dance). (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. For more information, call 212-545-7536. May 9.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through May 23: **Maude Maggart,** the sultry and sweet-voiced sister of the pop star Fiona Apple, performs songs by Sondheim, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and Gershwin, among others, backed by **John Boswell,** on piano, and **Yair Evnine,** on cello and guitar.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—May 6-9: The **David Murray** quartet. On his annual visits to the city, the indomitable saxophonist demonstrates that he's lost none of the swagger of his late-eighties heyday.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—May 5-10: The saxophone virtuoso **James Carter** assembles a blue-chip band featuring the bassist **Christian McBride,** the organist **John Medeski,** and the drummer **Joey Baron.**

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St (212-744-1600)—Through May 30: **Judy Collins** has made a seamless transition from folk deity

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MONEY MATTERS

There is much to savor in "The Late Film," a BAM series of movies made toward the close—or the climax—of their directors' careers. Of all the works selected, none could be less autumnal than Robert Bresson's

CINECOM/PHOTOFEST

"L'Argent" (1983), which screens on May 10. Adapted from a tale by Tolstoy, it is as swift and wintry as a sudden frost. As often with Bresson, the actors are mostly nonprofessionals, and they move through the series of terrible events like stoics and sleepwalkers, lacking the will to fight fate. A schoolboy pays for a picture frame with a forged note, which enters the social system as if it were a virus, and leads in the end to a feverish killing spree, in which not even the saintly are spared. Yet Bresson—who was eighty-two years old when the film came out, and clearly in no mood for mellowing—frames the acts of wickedness, both great and small, with a terrifying calm. Prepare to be haunted by his closeups of objects: a wallet, a ladle, a bowl of hot coffee, an axe. They might almost be guilty themselves.

—Anthony Lane

to cabaret icon. Her high artistry and disarming candor translate well to an intimate room.

CORNELIA STREET CAFÉ
29 Cornelia St. (212-989-9319)—May 7: With Cyminology, the German-Iranian vocalist Cymin Samawatie incorporates Farsi lyrics and Sufi poetry into a beguiling ethnic jazz blend. The duo of the vocalist **Theo Bleckmann** and the guitarist **Ben Monder** open the evening.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—May 8-10: A centennial shout-out for Benny Goodman, the bandleader who popularized swing music in 1935 with his appearance at the Palomar Ballroom, in Los Angeles, featuring a world-class clarinettist, **Ken Peplowski.** Other swing-inclined celebrants include the singer **Carol Sloane,** the trumpeter **Warren Vache,** and the percussionist **Chuck Redd.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—May 5-10: **Branford Marsalis.** On his strong new album, "Metamorphosen," the formidable saxophonist is backed by his long-term (and tight-knit) quartet spotlighting the pianist **Joey Calderazzo** and the gleefully assertive drummer **Jeff** (Tain) **Watts. Justin Faulkner** has the drum seat for this run. May 11: The **Mingus Orchestra.**

"LOST JAZZ SHRINES"
May 8: The bassist **Ray Drummond** and the pianists **Renee Rosnes, Bill Mays,** and **Barry Harris** pay tribute to Bradley's, the legendary Greenwich Village club that was the late-night hangout of choice for musicians and jazz cognoscenti from 1969 to 1996. Note: A free discussion with Drummond and the jazz writer Ted Panken takes place an hour and a half before the show. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460.)

SMALLS
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—May 7: The swing and stride pianist **Ehud Asherie** performs duets with the trumpeter **Jon-Erik Kellso.** May 11: The drummer **Ari Hoenig** is joined by the skillful post-bop pianist **Jean-Michel Pilc** and others.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—May 5-10: The pianist **Brad Mehldau,** one of the most assured stylists of his generation, takes full advantage of a longtime association with the bassist **Larry Grenadier** and the drummer **Jeff Ballard.** Together they never get lost, even when scaling the cliffs of high-risk improvisation. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Cast in Bronze: French Sculpture from Renaissance to Revolution."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Art of the Korean Renaissance, 1400-1600."** Through June 21. ♦ **"Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard."** Through May 25. ♦ **"The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984."** Through Aug. 2. ♦ **"Roxy Paine on the Roof: Maelstrom."** Through Oct. 25. ♦ **"The Model as Muse: Embodying Fashion."** Opens May 6. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective."** Through May 11. ♦ **"Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh."** Through May 18. ♦ **"a shimmer of possibility: Photographs by Paul Graham."** Through May 18. ♦ **"Projects 89: Klara Liden."** Through June 8. ♦ **"Into the Sunset: Photography's Image of the American West."** The show opens with Richard Prince's Marlboro cowboy leaping into the circle of his lariat before a vista of flat, golden plains. Look right and you're staring into the weathered face of an unemployed blackjack dealer, in a portrait by Richard Avedon. Look left and a row of classic landscape views by Laura Gilpin, Edward Weston, Minor White, and Timothy O'Sullivan leads to Carleton Watkins's panoramic triptych of Yosemite. As the curator, Eva Respini, points out, the introduction and popular use of photography paralleled the exploration and exploitation of the West. Drawn largely from the museum's collection, the show tracks this symbiotic relationship with spirit and wit. Respini is not afraid to mix things up, juxtaposing Ansel Adams and Stephen Shore, David Hockney and Dorothea Lange, and Cindy Sherman's pigtailed latter-day frontierswoman with the cast of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Through June 8. ♦ **"Compass in Hand: Selections from the Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection."** Through July 27. ♦ **"Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel."** Through June 15. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Intervals: Julieta Aranda."** Through July 19. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Jenny Holzer: Protect Protect."** Through May 31. ♦ **"Sadie Benning: Play Pause."** Through Aug. 30. ♦ **"Claes Oldenburg: Early Sculpture, Drawings, and Happenings Films."** Opens May 7. ♦ **"Claes Oldenburg and Cossje van Bruggen: The Music Room."** Opens May 7. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

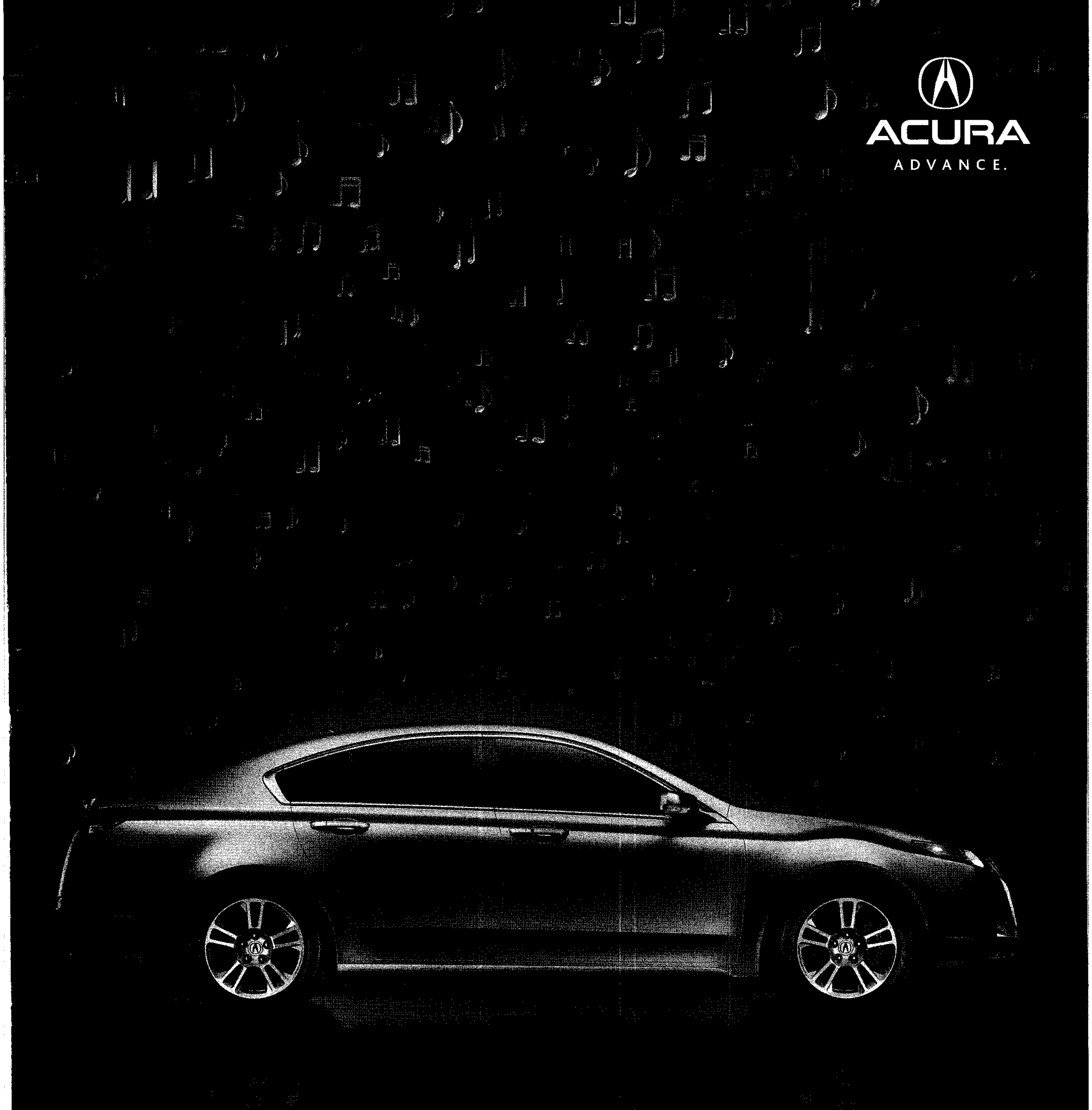
BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture."** Through May 10. ♦ **"Hernan Bas: Works from the Rubell Family Collection."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Sun K. Kwak: Enfolding Two Hundred and Eighty Hours."** Through July 5. ♦ **"Gustave Caillebotte: Impressionist Paintings from Paris to the Sea."** Through July 5. ♦ **"Reflections in the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Yang Fudong: Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest."** Through Sept. 13. (Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Fashioning Felt."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Shahzia Sikander Selects: Works from the Permanent Collection."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**"Unica Zürn: Dark Spring."** The story of Zürn's life threatens to overshadow her work: in 1970, the fifty-four-year-old German artist, who suffered frequent bouts of depression, jumped to her death from the Paris apartment she shared with her lover, the Surrealist Hans Bellmer. This absorbing show, organized by João Ribas, reveals a gifted—and, yes, tortured—artist, who merits more than the footnote she's been allocated in the annals of Surrealism. (Zürn may be best known as the author of the cult roman à clef "Dark Spring.") Intricate works on paper, made using the Surrealist technique of automatic drawing, are filled with fantastical creatures that curl into and out of patterned abstraction. Vitrines in the middle of the gallery contain printed matter, including an ex-



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hibition catalogue of Zürn's work with an introduction written in illegible glyphs by Max Ernst. Disturbing photographs of the artist's body, bound into grotesqueries with cord, look uncannily like Bellmer's dolls, transforming a model and muse into a masochistic collaborator. Through July 23. (Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Masterpieces of European Painting from the Norton Simon Museum."** Through May 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime + Manga + Video Games."** Through June 14. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker."** Through Aug. 2. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"On the Money: Cartoons for *The New Yorker.*"** Through May 24. ♦ **"New at the Morgan: Acquisitions Since 2004."** Through Oct. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"184th Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Art."** Through June 10. (Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913."** Through June 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"The Generational: Younger Than Jesus."** Through June 14. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Harlem 1970-2009: Photographs by Camilo José Vergara."** Through July 12. ♦ **"Landmarks of New York."** Through July 12. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Kalup Linzy: If It Don't Fit."** Through June 28. ♦ **"Collected: Propositions on the Permanent Collection."** Through June 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

JOHN OUTTERBRIDGE / NOAH DAVIS
The septuagenarian Outterbridge has been working and teaching in Los Angeles since the sixties. The fact that he's a former director of the Watts Towers Art Center comes as no surprise: his assemblages recall Dadaist and Surrealist constructions, filtered through folk art. Cobbled together from bits of metal and fabric, the works here include humorous, sometimes political accents, like the tiny American flag dangling from the wall-mounted "I Mus Speak" and the colorful, woven-fabric shapes in "Ragged Bar Code." The twenty-five-year-old Davis, also based in L.A., steals more than a few tricks from Marlene Dumas and Luc Tuymans, in paintings loosely based on the myth of Osiris. Through May 16. (Tilton, 8 E. 76th St. 212-737-2221.)

Short List

RAY JOHNSON: Feigen, 34 E. 69th St. 212-628-0700. Through July 31. **ALICE NEEL:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Opens May 6. **ALBERT OEHLEN:** Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060. Through May 30. **MIMMO ROTELLA:** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550. Through July 31. **ANRI SALA:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Opens May 6.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

JEFF BARK
For his first New York exhibition, "Flesh Rainbow," Bark shows large-scale photographs of male nudes, female nudes, and still-lifes, in triptychs that include one of each. But don't expect a polite, academic exercise. Bark's figures are bizarre—outrageous and fetishistic, sometimes more comic than erotic, often both at once. One ample woman is veiled to the waist in tendrils of her own dark hair; a lithe young man has had a large bowl of spaghetti overturned on his head; another one wears a black bucket. Their faces obscured and their bodies tinted by sunlight falling through colored gels, Bark's models might be creatures of artifice, but they're also far more naked than nude and unlike anything you've seen before. Through May 23. (Cowles, 537 W. 24th St. 212-741-8999.)

ANDREW BUSH
Bush's big color photographs of people driving their cars are spread between two galleries, providing ample opportunities for the kind of voyeurism and snap judgments that are usually indulged on the road. Nearly all the pictures were taken in and around Los Angeles, where Bush lives, and are straightforward but surprisingly elegant. California's cult of the car is only part of the story here; the vehicles start to look like sleek or clunky mobile sculptures, but their occupants are far more interesting. Most are unaware of the camera in the next car, cocooned in their air-conditioned living rooms on wheels. Bush skewers some of his subjects neatly, but others sit obliviously for portraits as rich and intriguing as any out there. Through May 23. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410; Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370. Through June 27.)

JENNIFER DALTON
How do we value art—or all the objects in our lives, for that matter? Dalton tackles the question with an installation in which everything she owns is up for sale. Using skills honed in a day job at Christie's auction house, she has photographed and catalogued everything from household appliances to gifts from Mom to art works made by friends like Anthony Goicolea, Karen Heagle, and Kirsten Hassenfeld. (Dalton will use the proceeds from these sales to buy more works by the same artists.) The project's absurd, satirical bent is even evident on the price list: a humble American flag, which Dalton found taped to a bush outside her home, goes for three thousand dollars. Through May 9. (Winkleman, 637 W. 27th St. 212-643-3152.)

ANDRÉ ETHIER
Some of the best paintings in Chelsea right now are the work of this Toronto-based rock musician. The visionary allegories of Bosch and Arcimboldo, Goya's "Los Caprichos," the Symbolist fantasies of Odilon Redon, van Gogh's Expressionist still-lifes, the slacker-hippie comics of R. Crumb, and the cosmic finger paintings of the Midwestern outsider Eugene von Brunchenheim all come to mind in these paintings on Masonite or wood, often sealed with varnish. An old boot spouts a cosmological still-life; a tuna-loving hobo, a sea monster, and a skull are all smoking. What they're smoking isn't clear—only suggested—but the works themselves are sterling examples of painting as a consciousness-altering engine for maker and viewer alike. Through May 16. (Eller, 615 W. 27th St. 212-206-6411.)

VERA LUTTER
In a departure from her signature camera-obscura photographs of architecture and landscapes, Lutter exhibits vividly colored closeups of hibiscus blooms. Nine framed photographs—a condensed life cycle, from fleshy petals dusted with pollen to shrivelled, papery husks—face a wall-filling

TABLES FOR TWO
SHANG

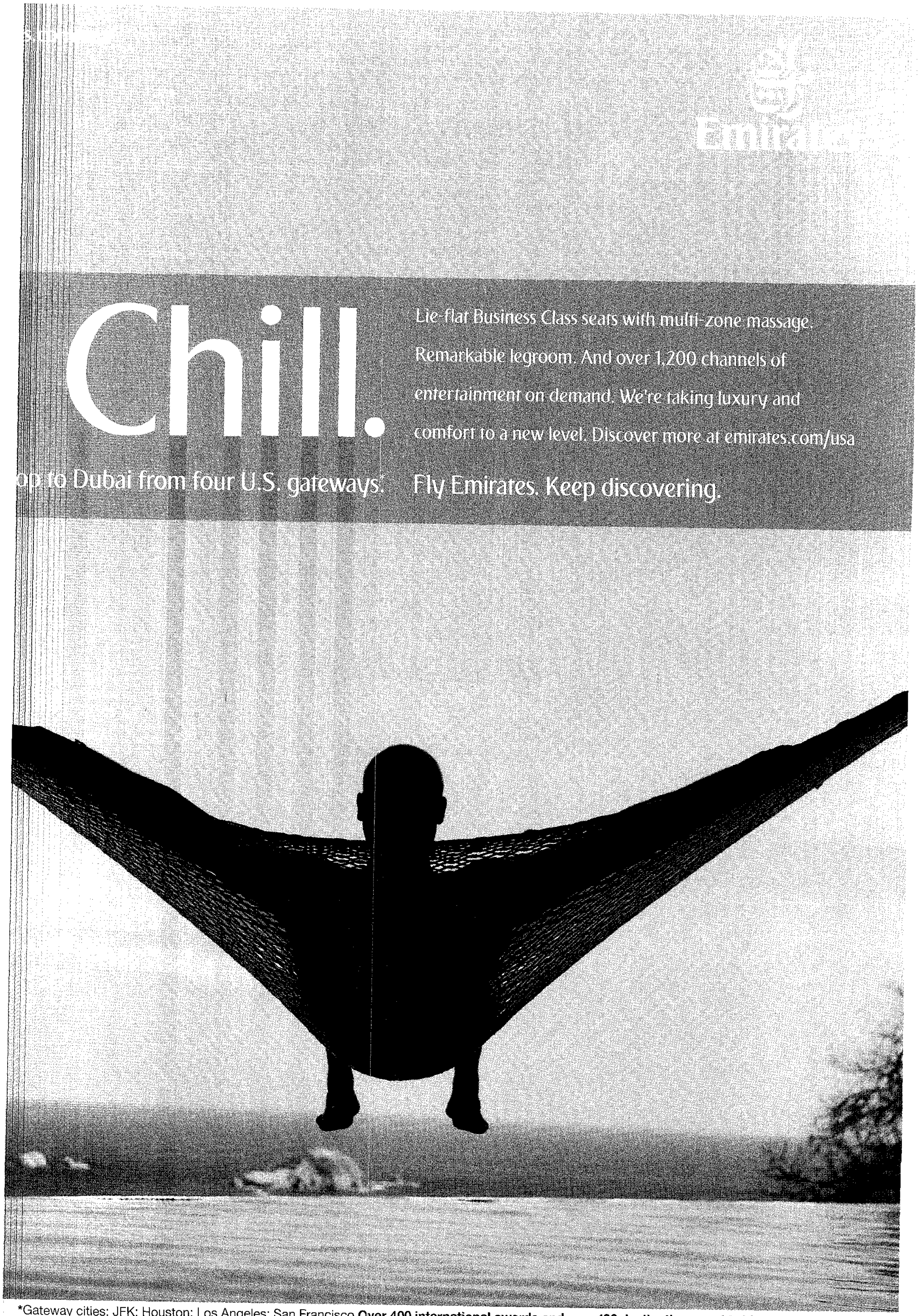
HONORE BROWN

187 Orchard St., at Stanton St. (212-260-7900)—Susur Lee has been called one of the best chefs in Canada—a bit of a backhanded compliment, and a characterization that accounts, perhaps, for his decision last year to shutter his eponymous restaurant in Toronto and head for New York. The result, in the Thompson Hotel LES, is named Shang, and its menu takes in Lee's early years in Hong Kong, where he lived until he was twenty, the multicultural influences of Ontario, and his three-year sojourn in Singapore. Even if there's a sense that many of the diners are hotel guests, it's still a pretty chic crowd—girls with eyelid-skimming bangs, men with kaffiyehs wrapped around their necks. Only the odd towheaded toddler gives the game away.

Back in Toronto, Lee was famous for his tasting menu, which turned the concept of course progression upside down. If you start with small things, Lee reasoned, people will be too full to appreciate the heartier courses at the end. So meals at Susur went from main dish to appetizer to fish to soup to dessert. At Shang, the menu is à la carte, and the sense of progression, in either direction, appears absent. The philosophy, instead, seems to be to stuff them early *and* late. Sizable dishes included the Singapore Slaw, billed as the restaurant's signature, a towering mountain of julienned vegetables, fried taro, and hazelnuts, mixed table-side, with an addictive salted-plum dressing. A thin cap of crispy potato hid golf-ball-size vegetable dumplings, packed with rich, flavorful greens, mushrooms, and corn.

The fact that most of what arrived was delicious became a double-edged sword—it took an iron will to try to save room. It was worth it, though, since by far the best dish on the menu came late: rosy lamb chops that could be cut with a butter knife, with a peanut sauce good enough to spoon up by itself. At the end of a recent dinner, Lee himself, tall, elegantly slim, with his hair pulled back into a ponytail, stopped by the table to remark on how much remained of an order of duck, breaded with taro and served with savory pillowy pancakes. ("We just ordered too much," the table protested. Lee replied, "I noticed.") He happily shared his technique for producing a gorgeous octopus salad. "We take the tentacles, and wrap them tightly, and leave them overnight. And then, like a sausage, we slice them very thin." He paused for a moment, and asked, "Do you cook at home?" (Open daily for breakfast and dinner. Entrées $12-$25.)

—*Andrea Thompson*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projection of hundreds more flowers, each captioned, faintly, with the name of a civilian killed in the Iraq war since the U.S. invasion in 2003. More names are printed in dense rows on tinted film that darkens the gallery's windows. As memorials go, this one is unusually subtle and lovely, inviting—and rewarding—quiet contemplation. Through June 20. (Nitsch, 534 W. 22nd St. 212-645-2030.)

LISA ROSS
On visits to a remote desert region in northwest China, Ross has photographed the burial and pilgrimage sites of saints revered by the Uyghurs, one of the country's ethnic minority groups. Some of the graves are surrounded by picket fences and look like cribs or empty garden plots; others are collections of twigs and leafless branches, some up to sixty feet high, all flying tattered prayer flags left by pilgrims hoping for the saint's blessing or cure. The faded pink, yellow, orange, and green of these little scraps are the only colors under the pale-blue skies. Though hardly cheerful, these makeshift folk sculptures feel brave, defiant, and optimistic against all odds. Through June 13. (Mahmood, 511 W. 25th St. 212-675-2966.)

MICHAEL WETZEL
The equation between painting and cuisine is centuries old, going back at least to the days when pigment, like spice, was ground with a mortar and pestle. Wetzel's shimmering canvases of tables laden with lobsters, shrimp cocktail, pastries, and champagne collapse a range of pictorial traditions, from Whistler's nocturnes and the calligraphic brushwork of Japanese screens to mid-century-modern cookbook illustrations. Stylized still-lifes of *pasta pomodoro* recall the spaghetti in James Rosenquist's Pop icon "F-111." Wetzel's work is not overwhelmingly innovative or virtuosic, but its pleasures are a heady cocktail of nostalgia and effervescence. Through May 16. (John Connelly Presents, 625 W. 27th St. 212-337-9563.)

Short List

SOPHIE CALLE: Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through May 22. **CHUCK CLOSE:** Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through June 20. **PHIL COLLINS:** Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144. Through June 20. **HUANG YONG PING:** Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-7606. Through July 31. **YAYOI KUSAMA:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through June 27. **ROBERT LONGO:** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100. Through May 30. **ZWELETHU MTHETHWA:** Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 212-645-1701. Through May 23. **ALBERT OEHLEN:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through May 30. **NAM JUNE PAIK:** James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500. Through May 30. **PABLO PICASSO:** Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717. Through June 6. **MASATO SETO:** Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610. Through May 9. **JESSICA STOCKHOLDER:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Opens May 7.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

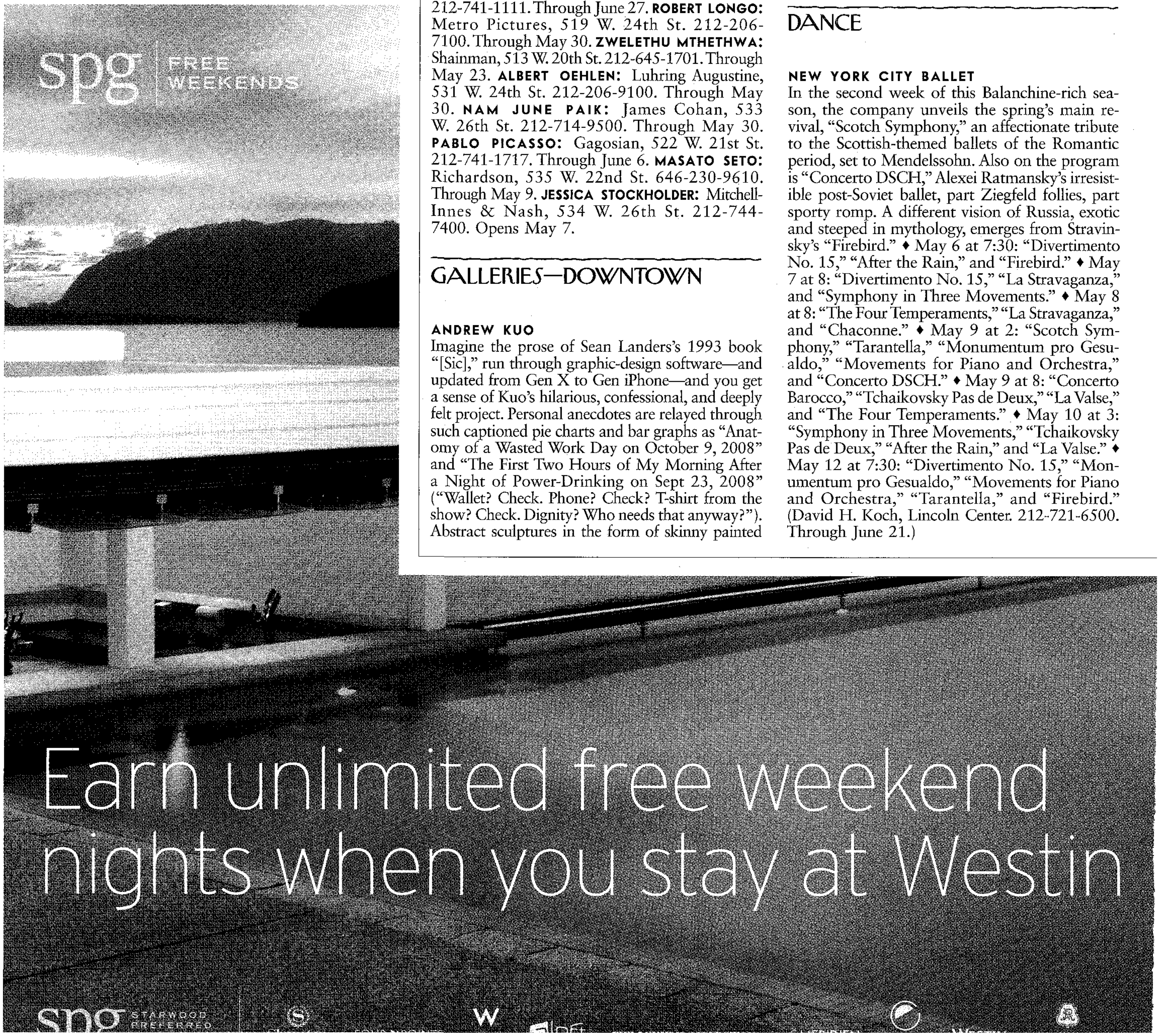
ANDREW KUO
Imagine the prose of Sean Landers's 1993 book "[Sic]," run through graphic-design software—and updated from Gen X to Gen iPhone—and you get a sense of Kuo's hilarious, confessional, and deeply felt project. Personal anecdotes are relayed through such captioned pie charts and bar graphs as "Anatomy of a Wasted Work Day on October 9, 2008" and "The First Two Hours of My Morning After a Night of Power-Drinking on Sept 23, 2008" ("Wallet? Check. Phone? Check? T-shirt from the show? Check. Dignity? Who needs that anyway?"). Abstract sculptures in the form of skinny painted planks have tongue-in-cheek titles like "What I Was Afraid of Before (Blue) and What I'm Afraid of Now (Purple)." A cluster of cavalier-looking figurative paintings would be less than compelling if they didn't mark such heartbreaking milestones as "Dad's Last Breath." Through May 16. (Taxter & Spengemann, 123 E. 12th St. 212-924-0212.)

Short List

VERNE DAWSON: Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Opens May 8. **LIZ DESCHENES:** Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774. Through June 13. **ALBERTO GIACOMETTI:** Freeman, 560 Broadway at Prince St. 212-966-5154. Through June 27. **MICHELLE HANDELMAN:** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through May 31. **JUTTA KOETHER:** Spaulings, 165 East Broadway. 212-477-5006. Through May 24. **MANON:** Swiss Institute, 495 Broadway, at Broome St. 212-925-2035. Through June 20. **MARILYN MINTER:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through June 13. **CARRIE MOYER:** Canada, 55 Chrystie St. 212-925-4631. Opens May 7. **MATT SHERIDAN SMITH:** Cooley, 34 Orchard St. 212-680-0564. Through May 24. **"INDIAN OCEAN":** Dispatch, 127 Henry St. 212-227-2783. Through May 10.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
In the second week of this Balanchine-rich season, the company unveils the spring's main revival, "Scotch Symphony," an affectionate tribute to the Scottish-themed ballets of the Romantic period, set to Mendelssohn. Also on the program is "Concerto DSCH," Alexei Ratmansky's irresistible post-Soviet ballet, part Ziegfeld follies, part sporty romp. A different vision of Russia, exotic and steeped in mythology, emerges from Stravinsky's "Firebird." ♦ May 6 at 7:30: "Divertimento No. 15," "After the Rain," and "Firebird." ♦ May 7 at 8: "Divertimento No. 15," "La Stravaganza," and "Symphony in Three Movements." ♦ May 8 at 8: "The Four Temperaments," "La Stravaganza," and "Chaconne." ♦ May 9 at 2: "Scotch Symphony," "Tarantella," "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," and "Concerto DSCH." ♦ May 9 at 8: "Concerto Barocco," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "La Valse," and "The Four Temperaments." ♦ May 10 at 3: "Symphony in Three Movements," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "After the Rain," and "La Valse." ♦ May 12 at 7:30: "Divertimento No. 15," "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Tarantella," and "Firebird." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through June 21.)



ALONZO KING'S LINES BALLET
King's lithe dancers perform "Rasa," set to a score composed by the tabla virtuoso Zakir Hussain, and the new "Dust and Light," set to music by Corelli and Poulenc. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 5-6 at 7:30, May 7-8 at 8, May 9 at 2 and 8, and May 10 at 2.)

"CATALAN DAYS"
The free dance portion of this festival showcasing Barcelona's contemporary arts scene includes Sónia Gómez's "My Mother and I" (May 5), a slog through mother-daughter relations, and "Volume II," a murkily lit and somewhat grotesque solo piece by Societat Doctor Alonso (May 6). Mal Pelo's "Bach" (May 7) is more rigorous, a ballet-based reflection on "The Well-Tempered Clavier"; the veteran dancemaker Àngels Margarit reënacts the creative process and does clever things with string in her "Solo por Placer" (May 8). (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. For reservations, which are required, call 212-279-4200. May 5-8 at 8.)

VIA KATLEHONG/"WOZA"
Peak Performances presents this all-male company from South Africa, specializing in "pantsula," an urban style developed in the nineteen-fifties. In addition to the high-energy dancing and percussive footwork—especially in the "gumboot" sections—the guys bring a slice of township life, complete with catcalls, competitive moves, and plenty of horseplay. (Alexander Kasser, One Normal Ave., Montclair State University, Montclair, N.J. 973-655-5112. May 7-8 at 7:30, May 9 at 8, and May 10 at 3.)

ALEXANDRA BELLER/DANCES
Beller's assemblages of text and movement layer the smart with the visceral. Her new quintet asks "What Comes After Happy" in a collage cobbled out of self-help seminars, children's television, G.P.S. directions, and fortune cookies. "Egg," a solo for the choreographer, draws on her first year of motherhood, confronting expectations of perfection by setting her characteristically headlong dancing amid twelve dozen raw eggs. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. May 7-9 at 8 and May 10 at 5.)

RAJIKA PURI
In "Tapasya," an evening of interlinked solo and group dances, the choreographer Rajika Puri uses the traditional steps and vocalizations of Odissi and bharata natyam and combines them with texts and stories (in English), illustrating the principles of asceticism in Hindu mythology. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. May 7-9 at 8 and May 10 at 3.)

"ROCK 'N ROLL PENGUIN"
Imagine a Japanese Jacques Tati with a candy-colored Mohawk and his similarly coiffed best friend, and you may begin to understand the appeal of the comedic duo Gamarjobat, who pull off more sight gags with a baguette than you could imagine. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. May 8 at 7, May 9 at 2 and 7, and May 10 at noon and 5. Through May 24.)

LARISSA VELEZ
A onetime burlesque artist and current faux-naïf, Velez shares the results of her recent residency at Dance Theatre Workshop. "Loving Overkill Via Satellite" draws on a cast of twenty-five to populate her psyche, likely an amusing place to be. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. May 8-9 at 7:30.)

SING SING
Taking its name from a Papua New Guinean pidgin term for a musical gathering, this ten-member touring group bundles music and dance from the indigenous peoples of the Melanesian region. Tradition is represented in the sweet harmonies, fierce drumming, body paint, and exuberant dancing, but there's also a more contemporary world-music sensibility. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-545-7536. May 9 at 8.)

NYC AERIAL DANCE FESTIVAL
Julie Ludwick and the far from acrophobic folk of Fly-by-Night Dance Theatre gather together colleagues who share their interest in exploring the expressive possibilities of the trapeze and its family of apparatus. The pregnant Sara Joel dances in and on a Plexiglas sphere. The comic singer Josh Diamond serves as m.c. (JCC, 334 Amsterdam Ave. 212-352-3101. May 9 at 8:30.)

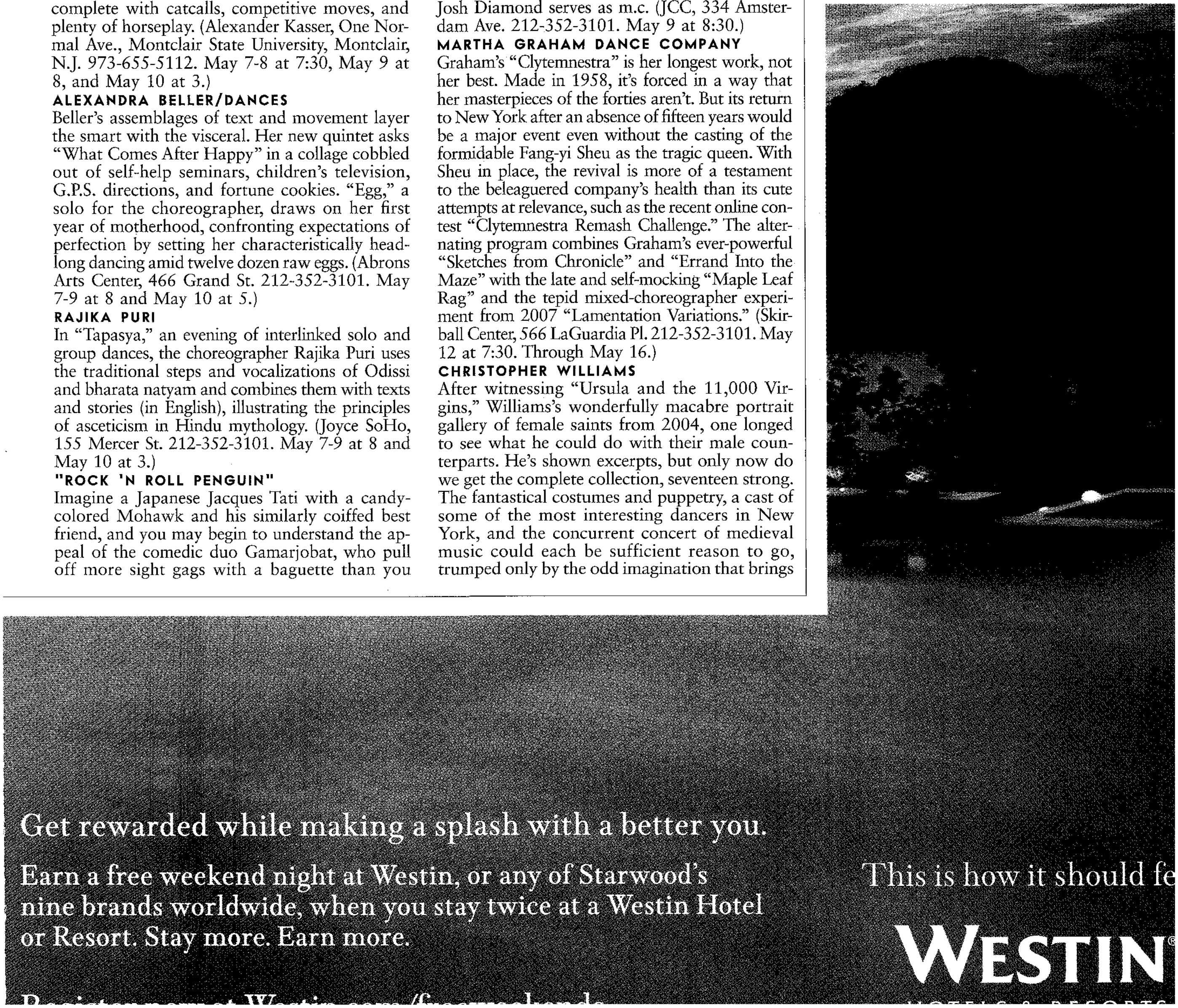
MARTHA GRAHAM DANCE COMPANY
Graham's "Clytemnestra" is her longest work, not her best. Made in 1958, it's forced in a way that her masterpieces of the forties aren't. But its return to New York after an absence of fifteen years would be a major event even without the casting of the formidable Fang-yi Sheu as the tragic queen. With Sheu in place, the revival is more of a testament to the beleaguered company's health than its cute attempts at relevance, such as the recent online contest "Clytemnestra Remash Challenge." The alternating program combines Graham's ever-powerful "Sketches from Chronicle" and "Errand Into the Maze" with the late and self-mocking "Maple Leaf Rag" and the tepid mixed-choreographer experiment from 2007 "Lamentation Variations." (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-352-3101. May 12 at 7:30. Through May 16.)

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS
After witnessing "Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins," Williams's wonderfully macabre portrait gallery of female saints from 2004, one longed to see what he could do with their male counterparts. He's shown excerpts, but only now do we get the complete collection, seventeen strong. The fantastical costumes and puppetry, a cast of some of the most interesting dancers in New York, and the concurrent concert of medieval music could each be sufficient reason to go, trumped only by the odd imagination that brings it all together. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. May 12 at 7:30. Through May 16.)

MOMIX
"Go green" is the message of "Botanica," Moses Pendleton's newest work for his troupe of illusionist dancers, at the Joyce. In this characteristically imagistic collage, built as a series of multimedia sketches, the dancers transform their bodies into the vanishing flora and fauna of our planet, with the help of projections, black light, and prostheses. A couple of the tableaux, like the one in which a female dancer swirls within a lampshade-like structure of beads, were seen in Pendleton's choreography for Diana Vishneva's one-woman show "Beauty in Motion." (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 12 at 7:30. Through May 31.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Cesare Lievi's production of Rossini's **"La Cenerentola"** is as close to pure joy as you will find in a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big-time opera house. The cast, a promising mixture of newcomers and relative veterans, includes such singers as Elina Garanča, Lawrence Brownlee, Simone Alberghini, Alessandro Corbelli, and John Relyea; Maurizio Benini conducts. (May 6 at 8 and May 9 at 12:30.) ♦ The first two operas in Wagner's "Ring" cycle are laced with a gnawing sense of helplessness and regret; **"Siegfried,"** with its heroic title character, displays a brash, youthful assurance, but the complex chromatic harmony that comes to dark fruition in the fourth and final installment, "Götterdämmerung," creeps into the final act. The hardy tenor Jon Fredric West is Siegfried, with Linda Watson, Wendy White, James Morris, and Robert Brubaker completing the cast; James Levine, who knows this music as well as anyone alive, conducts. (May 7 at 6.) ♦ David McVicar's fine new production of **"Il Trovatore"** successfully reclaims Verdi's ardent melodrama for the house. This performance features Hasmik Papian, Mzia Nioradze, Marco Berti, and Željko Lučić; Riccardo Frizza. (May 8 at 8.) ♦ **"Götterdämmerung,"** the final chapter of the "Ring" cycle, is a musical and literary tapestry—spun largely from the strands of human evil—of an almost Shakespearean density. Otto Schenk's production sets the opera in a medieval age of ceremony and violence, making the destruction of Siegfried and Brünnhilde's romance especially lawless and brutal. John Tomlinson is gripping in the role of the malicious Hagen. With Linda Watson, Margaret Jane Wray, Jon Fredric West, and Iain Paterson; James Levine taps into the score's seismic power. (May 9 at 6:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. Note: these are the final performances of the season.)

An untitled photograph by Masato Seto, from the "Binran" series, at Richardson.

BRONX OPERA: "THE MAGIC FLUTE"

In the down economy, quality organizations with low overhead continue to thrive. One is this respected outer-borough company, which offers two performances of Mozart's Masonic masterpiece (in English) at Lehman College; Eric Kramer and Michael Spierman alternate on the podium. (Lovinger Theatre, 250 Bedford Park Blvd. W., the Bronx. 718-960-8833. May 8-9 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Peter Lieberson began "The World in Flower," a cantata for mezzo-soprano, baritone, orchestra, and chorus, as a showcase for his wife, Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, but her untimely death led him to thoroughly reconsider the work's design; what was originally a tribute to an honored Buddhist emperor became a wide-ranging piece featuring texts by such authors as Whitman, Hopkins, Rilke, and Rumi, a plea for tolerance in a broken world. Joyce DiDonato and Russell Braun, assisted by the New York Choral Artists, are featured in the cantata's world première; Alan Gilbert, who conducts, rounds out the program with another celebration of life, Mahler's First Symphony (with the lovely "Blumine" movement, discarded by the composer, performed as a prelude to Lieberson's piece). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. May 7 at 7:30 and May 8-9 at 8.)

ORCHESTRA OF THE S.E.M. ENSEMBLE

The Flux Quartet and the ensemble Ostravská Banda join Petr Kotik's intrepid chamber orchestra in their latest jaunt into the avant-garde: music by Ligeti (the Violin Concerto), Salvatore Sciarrino, Christian Wolff, and Elliott Carter (the luminous "Dialogues for Piano and Orchestra"). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. May 6 at 8.)

STAATSKAPELLE BERLIN: THE MAHLER SYMPHONIES

Has New York ever seen the like? Carnegie Hall gives nearly two weeks of its schedule over to Daniel Barenboim and his remarkable ensemble, which plays with a lustrous, relaxed, Old World sound. They perform all of Mahler's symphonies with Barenboim and Pierre Boulez—equal in fame, opposite in temperament—alternating on the podium. May 6 at 8: Barenboim conducts the Symphony No. 1 in D Major and "Kindertotenlieder" (with the baritone Thomas Quasthoff). ♦ May 7 at 8: Boulez leads the orchestra in the Symphony No. 2, "Resurrection," with the vocal soloists Dorothea Röschmann and Michelle DeYoung, assisted by the Westminster Symphonic Choir. ♦ May 8 at 8: Boulez and DeYoung (along with the women of the Westminster) return for the Symphony No. 3 in D Minor. ♦ May 9 at 8: Röschmann and Boulez are featured in a concert that begins with a selection of songs from "Des Knaben Wunderhorn" and concludes with the Symphony No. 4 in G Major. ♦ May 10 at 2: Barenboim conducts the "Rückert Lieder" (with Quasthoff) and the Symphony No. 5 in C-Sharp Minor. ♦ May 12 at 8: The first week of concerts concludes with Boulez conducting the Symphony No. 6 in A Minor. (212-247-7800. See also Recitals.)

ENSEMBLE INTERCONTEMPORAIN

Susanna Mälkki, one of the most promising of young European conductors, leads the matchless French new-music orchestra in two concerts featuring masterworks by György Ligeti along with music by three younger stars. May 8 at 8: The Chamber Concerto, the Piano Concerto, and "Mysteries of the Macabre" share the program with pieces by Michael Jarrell and Unsuk Chin. ♦ May 9 at 8: "Melodien," the Violin Concerto, and Bruno Mantovani's "Le Sette Chiese." (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500.)

"WORDLESS MUSIC" SERIES: "ARVO PÄRT COMPOSER'S PORTRAIT"

In a serious coup for the young genre-busting series, the king of Baltic minimalism gets his due in a program at (Le) Poisson Rouge, conducted by Jeffrey Milarsky, that includes not only such classics as "Fratres" and "Summa" but also the New York première of the Fourth Symphony ("Los Angeles"), which was premièred in January by no less than Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. May 10 at 7:30 and 10.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

The New York première of Ned Rorem's "11 Songs for Susan"—featuring the mezzo-soprano Susan Graham—is at the center of the ensemble's latest concert; surrounding it is a deftly chosen assemblage of pieces by Haydn (the Symphony No. 26, "Lamentatione"), Ravel ("Pavane for a Dead Princess"), and Stravinsky ("Danses Concertantes"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 11 at 8.)

RECITALS

ANDRÉ EMELIANOFF: "THE ARCHETYPAL CELLO"

Emelianoff, an ardent musician whose distinguished career has embraced both the traditional and modern repertories, offers a wide-ranging concert featuring works by Joan Tower, Beethoven (the Cello Sonatas Nos. 4-5), and Messiaen (a selection from "Quartet for the End of Time"); the percussionist Joshua Gates and the pianist Noreen Cassidy-Polera join him. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 6 at 8.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "NEW MUSIC IN THE ROSE"

The society's two "season composers"—George Tsontakis and William Bolcom—enjoy performances of their music alongside the up-and-comers Kati Agócs, Kristin Kuster, and David Ludwig; the musicians include the soprano Amy Burton (in Bolcom's "Let Evening Come") as well as the cello-and-piano duo of David Finckel and Wu Han (in the New York première of Tsontakis's "Mirror Image"). (Rose Studio, Lincoln Center. 212-875-5788. May 7 at 7:30.)

JEREMY DENK

If pianists could be rated on Wall Street, then Denk's stock would have soared after his stunning Zankel Hall recital last fall. He comes to Symphony Space to perform Bach's Goldberg Variations, discussing the work with Laura Kaminsky afterward. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. May 7 at 8.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

May 8 at 8: During a rich week for concerts at the Fifth Avenue pile, Till Fellner continues his sequence of concerts devoted to the Beethoven piano sonatas, performing the Sonatas Nos. 5-7 and No. 29 ("Hammerklavier"). ♦ May 9 at 8: The violinist Itzhak Perlman joins his talented protegés in the Perlman Music Program to perform a concert that includes Debussy's String Quartet and Mendelssohn's Octet, the players' final program of the season. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. For full schedule, see www.metmuseum.org.)

BARGEMUSIC

Mark Peskanov and Steven Beck, the floating chamber-music series' resident virtuosi on violin and piano, offer a program of rock-solid repertory for their duo combination: sonatas by Handel, Beethoven (the grand Sonata No. 10 in G Major), and Mozart along with Schubert's beguiling Fantasy in C Major. (Fulton Ferry Land-

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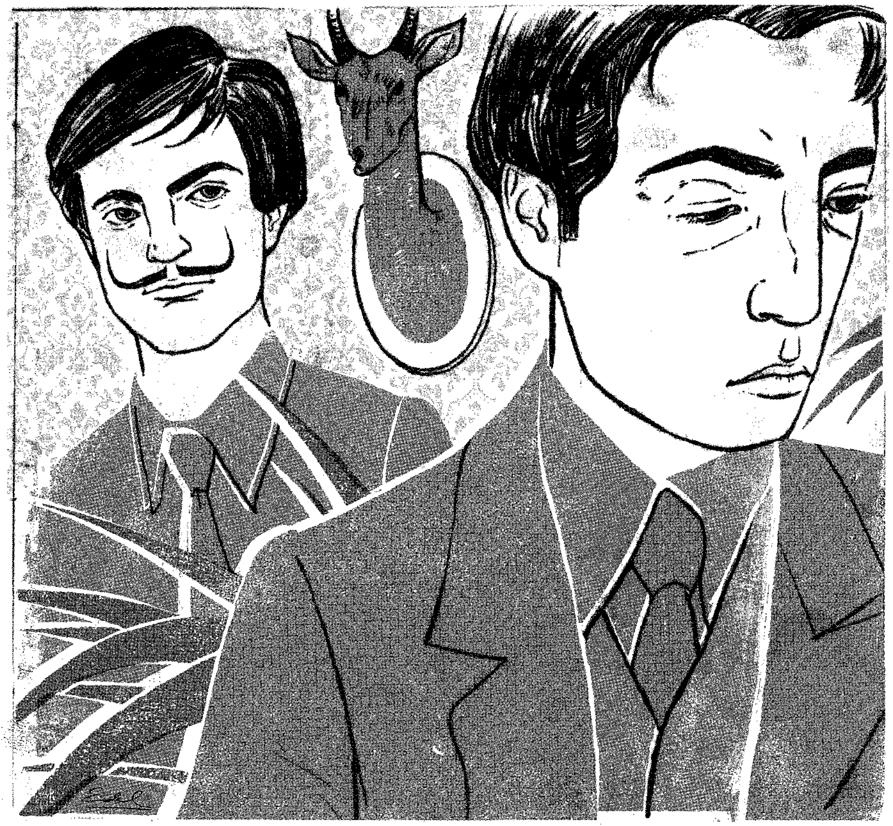
ing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. May 8-9 at 8. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

MIMESIS ENSEMBLE
Classical composers from the Middle East are rare, but Halim El-Dabh, over a long career, has achieved significant renown for a body of work that deftly blends Western techniques with the materials of his Egyptian heritage. In its final concert of the season, the group, joined by the Borromeo String Quartet, performs a chamber-orchestra version of "Clytemnestra" (a ballet written for Martha Graham, currently in revival), in addition to works by Scott Wheeler, Lansing McLoskey, and Mohammed Fairouz. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. www.ovationtix.com. May 9 at 8.)



Robert Pattinson and Javier Beltrán star in "Little Ashes," opening May 8.

MAGDALENA KOŽENÁ
The Czech mezzo-soprano brings her velvety timbre to songs by Purcell (in Britten's arrangements), Schumann ("Frauenliebe und -leben"), Duparc, and Berg ("Seven Early Songs"), accompanied by Karel Košárek. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. May 10 at 5.)

"WORKS & PROCESS" SERIES: "DONALD HALL—POETRY AND MUSIC"
Milton Babbitt and Charles Wuorinen are but two of the composers commissioned to write settings of poems by the celebrated American poet, who will also read from his work; the singers include Lauren Flanigan, Mary Nessinger, and Thomas Meglioranza. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. May 10-11 at 7:30.)

SEQUITUR
The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Tara Helen O'Connor is the star attraction of the latest concert by the new-music ensemble; she performs in the world première of the Piccolo Concertino by the admired Chinese composer Bun-Ching Lam, part of a program that also includes Michael Daugherty's naughty "Dead Elvis" (with the bassoonist Martin Kuuskmann). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 10 at 8.)

STAATSKAPELLE BERLIN
In the only exception to the orchestra's cycle of Mahler concerts, Daniel Barenboim, at the keyboard, joins members of the ensemble in Elliott Carter's Quintet for Piano and Winds and Quintet for Piano and Strings. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. May 11 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

ADORATION
This drama, directed by Atom Egoyan, stars Devon Bostick as a teen-ager who pretends that his father is a notorious terrorist. Opening May 8. (In wide release.)

BROTHERS AT WAR
A documentary, directed by Jake Rademacher, about his two brothers' military service in Iraq. Opening May 8. (Village Theatre VII.)

JULIA
Tilda Swinton stars in this drama, directed by Erick Zonca, about a poor, middle-aged woman who turns to crime. Opening May 8. (Angelika Film Center and Beekman.)

LITTLE ASHES
Robert Pattinson, Matthew McNulty, and Javier Beltrán star in this historical drama, set in the nineteen-twenties, about the friendship of Salvador Dali, Federico García Lorca, and Luis Buñuel. Opening May 8. (In limited release.)

NEXT DAY AIR
A crime comedy, directed by Benny Boom, about a pair of bumbling criminals (Donald Faison and Mike Epps) who come upon a shipment of cocaine and try to sell it. Opening May 8. (In wide release.)

OBJECTIFIED
This documentary, directed by Gary Hustwit, focusses on manufactured objects and their designers. Opening May 8. (IFC Center.)

OUTRAGE
Kirby Dick directed this documentary, about closeted gay politicians who promote anti-gay measures. Opening May 8. (Chelsea Cinemas.)

RUDO Y CURSI
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening May 8. (In limited release.)

STAR TREK
A science-fiction drama, based on the television series, in which Captain Kirk and Spock join forces to save the galaxy. Directed by J. J. Abrams; starring Ben Cross, Chris Pine, Leonard Nimoy, Anton Yelchin, Zoe Saldana, Eric Bana, and Simon Pegg. Opening May 8. (In wide release.)

THE WINDOW
Carlos Sorin directed this drama, inspired by Ingmar Bergman's "Wild Strawberries," about an elderly Argentinean man who reflects on his life. In Spanish. Opening May 6. (Film Forum.)

NOW PLAYING

ADVENTURELAND
The year is 1987, and a bunch of misfits who work at a dreary amusement park in Pittsburgh spend the summer grousing, toking up, and making out with one another. Greg Mottola's autobiographical movie is tenderly funny and lovable but also organically conceived—the colors, the music, and the moods all flow together. The picture has a melancholy lilt. The hero, James Brennan (Jesse Eisenberg), intellectual and excessively self-conscious, falls in love with Em (Kristen Stewart), a beautiful girl who hates her life and is lost in a sordid affair; James, making many mistakes along the way, slowly finds himself. This coming-of-age story is enlivened by Mottola's special generosity toward balled-up smart people who angrily reject conventional success yet remain desperate for acceptance. The manic Bill Hader and a silent, abashed Kristen Wiig play the couple who run the place; Martin Starr is a morosely unattractive Russian-lit major who complains about everything in the lugubrious drone of a campus coffee-shop wit. The only weak bit of casting is the Canadian actor Ryan Reynolds, who's too timid to play a good-looking cad with the proper conviction. The ghastly music playing endlessly on the park's loudspeakers is relieved by the music that the kids play for themselves, including Lou Reed, the Cure, and Hüsker Dü.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/13/09.) (In wide release.)

ANVIL! THE STORY OF ANVIL
Anybody schooled in "This Is Spinal Tap" could be forgiven for assuming that there was no further amusement, let alone rarer emotions, to be mined from heavy metal. Somehow, though, Sacha Gervasi's documentary digs deep into a real-life case—the attempted resurrection of Anvil, which was founded in the early nineteen-seventies and banged heads with fame in the eighties—to emerge with a saga of devotion and perseverance that seems at once touching and absurd. Gervasi is especially fortunate in having the founding fathers of the group, Robb Reiner and Steve (Lips) Kudlow, now in creased middle age, to guide us through its many downs and very occasional ups. The action stretches from their native Canada to Transylvania, via Japan and Stonehenge (the last being an obvious must-see for any Druid-haired rocker). By the end, to our surprise, we mind very much whether the fortunes of Anvil are set to soar or doomed to lurch once more; if most of their music sounds like a fight in a lumber mill, who cares?—*Anthony Lane* (4/20/09) (In limited release.)

IL DIVO
An elegant reunion for Paolo Sorrentino and Toni Servillo, the director and the star of "The Consequences of Love." In this case, the phlegmatic Servillo plays Giulio Andreotti—seven times Prime Minister of Italy, and an inextinguishable force at the heart of the country's politics. Try to imagine Nosferatu on the threshold of the Vatican and you come close to the bewitching figure that Servillo delivers here; he appears to glide rather than walk, to scorn minor sins in favor of larger conspiracy, and to taste each occurrence (even when it threatens his own position) for its comic savor. By the end, you can't say you know him, but you can't get enough of him, either. The movie that spins around him feels, perhaps unavoidably, less refined; Sorrentino flourishes the secondary characters in style, but he allows the complexities of parliamentary scheming—and of

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

Andreotti's reputed links to the Mafia—to splinter into fast, unmanageable fragments. If we can't hope to be enlightened, he seems to suggest, we might as well be dazed and confused. In Italian.—*A.L.* (5/4/09) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

FAAT KINÉ
Rapturously engaging. Ousmane Sembene names his movie for a single mother of two educated children, who manages a Dakar, Senegal, gas station with unbeatable aplomb, wielding a bicycle horn like a combination intercom and sceptre. She dispenses justice and knowledge directly, whether pepper-spraying a woman who accosts and insults her or advising a pal who has married a polygamous man to demand that he use a condom. Few movies celebrate so unabashedly and fully the virtues of a self-made businesswoman. Faat Kiné refuses to lend money to men who are bad risks or to borrow from a bank at exorbitant rates; she coolly faces down a customer trying to pass off phony bills. To say she never flinches would be an understatement: she exults in her strength and ability. Faat Kiné was on her way into the professional ranks when one of her college professors impregnated her. Her second child's father was jailed for fraud before they could marry. With the help of her mother—who shielded her when her morally outraged father tried to burn her alive—Faat Kiné has raised her daughter and son to be proud, nonsexist, and devoted to their native land. Her story ripples into a vision of a serene and multicultural Senegal. In its own modest, leisurely fashion, Sembene's movie sets off titanic good vibes. In French and Wolof. Released in 2000.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM; May 8.)

LE GARÇU
In his last film, from 1995, the French director Maurice Pialat displays his roiling tenderness for his son, Antoine, who, at age four, holds his own onscreen alongside the formidable Gérard Depardieu. The boy (called Antoine in the film) is smart, witty, impulsive, and fiercely self-confident—a real handful—and his father (called Gérard) is just as willful yet even more emotionally needy. When Gérard separates from the boy's mother, Sophie (Géraldine Pailhas), and both take up with new lovers, he lumbers heartbreakingly around Antoine, whom he desperately misses, like a wounded beast. Like the late Pialat (whose on-set furies were the stuff of legend), Gérard thrives on the conflicts he provokes, yet struggles mightily with himself to keep relations with Antoine steady and even—a battle greater than any Gérard can pick with those in his orbit. The film's title, dialect for "the boy" in Pialat's native Auvergne region, refers to someone other than Antoine: the vital, violent force of Gérard's nature is revealed to have deep and mighty roots akin to the director's own. In French.—*Richard Brody* (BAM; May 8.)

GOODBYE SOLO
A taxi passenger named William (Red West), perhaps seventy, a pouchy-eyed white Southerner, demands to be taken, in a week's time, to a mountain perch outside the city called Blowing Rock. We're in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and the driver, Solo (Souleymane Sy Savane), a Senegalese immigrant, young, handsome, and endlessly cheerful, refuses to help William carry out his apparent plan for suicide. Solo tries to reconcile his passenger to life, even moving in with him in his motel room, where they make a very strange couple. The independent writer-director Ramin Bahrani establishes the streets of Winston-Salem clearly enough, particularly at its squalid edges. Yet the movie, with the help of its realistic base, lifts off into an existential fable: one man's exuberant embrace of life crashes into the other's adamant rejection of it. Why does the old man want to die and the young man so badly need to save him? The power of the fable is derived from Bahrani's unwillingness to solve these mysteries beyond a few hints. Red West has a voice like raw whiskey; Savane's smile and rapid movements light up any space that he inhabits. You will think of them both for days after seeing the movie.—*D.D.* (4/13/09) (In limited release.)

THE LIMITS OF CONTROL
The end credits of the new Jim Jarmusch film read like paintings in a catalogue: "Nude," "Blonde," "Lone Man," and so on: an appropriate echo, since the movie itself is sprinkled with works of art, most of them studied on the walls of Spanish galleries by the loner at its center. As played by Isaach De Bankolé, he has no name but, by way of compensation, does have a fine selection of suits, in which he travels to Madrid, Seville, and elsewhere, hooking up with mysterious contacts, exchanging codes and diamonds, and gradually inching toward his ultimate (and surprisingly violent) task. The cityscapes, in particular, are shot with acuity and wit by the cinematographer Christopher Doyle, who pushes them to the brink of abstraction, and the supporting cast, which includes Gael García Bernal, Bill Murray, and Tilda Swinton, could hardly be hipper, or more tuned in to the styles of movies past. The only question is: when a film about a cool fellow, on a cool mission, looks this cool, what is to prevent it from freezing into a series of attitudes? Jarmusch lacks for nothing in his deadpan pastiche of spy thrillers, but some viewers may experience a residual, vulgar longing for the real thing. And you can't blame them.—*A.L.* (5/4/09) (In limited release.)

MONSTERS VS. ALIENS
A new animated feature from DreamWorks, directed by Rob Letterman and Conrad Vernon, in which a prospective bride (voiced by Reese Witherspoon) has her wedding day rudely interrupted by a falling meteorite. The impact leaves her as tall as the Chrysler Building, whereupon she is co-opted by the military and forced to join a squad of outlandish creatures, ranging from the politely inventive to the merely gelatinous, and voiced by Seth Rogen, Will Arnett, and Hugh Laurie. Their task, as you would expect, is to save the planet; this they proceed to do, against the threat of a dome-headed warmonger and his evil clones. There is little here that would not have crossed the minds of sci-fi enthusiasts in the nineteen-fifties, and, for all its digital novelty, the movie has the distinct air of a throwback. Still, it whips along briskly enough (even if the best gags, as ever, are in the trailer) and feels blessedly free of the in-jokes that have clogged up recent DreamWorks projects. Best seen in 3-D, if you can find the right theatre, though the extra dimension continues to seem less an inspiration than a stunt.—*A.L.* (4/6/09) (In wide release.)

OBSERVE AND REPORT
A rancid and unpleasant "black comedy" about a stupid mall security guard (Seth Rogen) who has delusions of grandeur. It's the kind of movie in which everyone but the hero and a chaste innocent (Collette Wolfe) turns out to be rotten and corrupt, and the director keeps scoring off the hapless characters, as if nastiness were some new form of hip. It doesn't work: the jokes are just sour, the violence is miserably staged, and the actors, including Anna Faris, Ray Liotta, Michael Peña, and Celia Weston, get trashed. The plot is devoted to a chubby middle-aged flasher who terrorizes the mall. The movie's audience gets treated in much the same way as the flasher's victims. Written and directed by Jody Hill (a co-creator of the TV series "Eastbound & Down").—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

RUDO Y CURSI
It starts well, in small-town Mexico, with a rough, tires-in-the-front-yard atmosphere of rivalry and cerveza-fed camaraderie. But the minute the two brothers, Beto (Diego Luna) and Tato (Gael García Bernal), get picked up by an unscrupulous travelling agent (Guillermo Francella) and fed into Mexico City soccer teams, where they become overnight stars, the plotting feels synthetic and arbitrary, and the direction glib, careless, and unconvincing. The boys are used by everybody, screwed by everybody, and they're both soulless idiots. The actors don't get a chance to open up the characters at all—they just have to do one stupid thing after another. There isn't a person of any intelligence in the movie. If an American had made the film, it would be considered a slander on Mexico. Written and directed by Carlos Cuarón (not to be confused with his

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
WOOLLY BULLIES

This year, metal has a horse in the pop race, and genre fanatics will likely tussle all year about how metal or not metal the band Mastodon really is. The Atlanta group that began somewhere between Metallica and several much soggier and stranger bands has broken most of its affinity ties with "Crack the Skye," a baggy, deeply entertaining album that embraces long melodies, longer songs, and a variety of fancy embellishments that metalheads (who invented some of these moves in the seventies) can never quite make peace with. "Skye" occasionally lands on the goofy side of baroque, but it's a negligible sin in the face of the intensity with which the band delivers its epic, sword-swinging music. Mastodon earns its excesses of form with the weight of its performances, and the band's crusty lead singer, Brent Hinds, still drops his voice down for the metal croak that will surely placate early fans dourly examining the band for signs of, eek, "softness." The band plays at the Fillmore New York at Irving Plaza on May 9.
—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

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brother Alfonso, who directed the wonderful "Y Tu Mamá También"). In Spanish.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

17 AGAIN

Wasn't once enough? Mike O'Donnell (Matthew Perry), an ironic, self-hating failed father and husband, is transported by an angel back to his seventeen-year-old self, in the person of the brazenly self-confident Zac Efron. But he's not his seventeen-year-old self in the past; it's still the present, and no one seems to notice Perry's absence or the resemblance of this smirking young man to the teen-age version of Perry. There are some embarrassing scenes in which Efron comes on to Perry's grownup wife (Leslie Mann), and still more embarrassing scenes in which their daughter comes on to him. The fantasy is mostly whimsical and arbitrary. Efron's self-assurance as a performer is the main thing the movie has going for it. Directed by Burr Steers; written by Jason Filardi.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

SILENCE AND CRY

The title alone of the Hungarian director Miklós Jancsó's exquisite yet harrowing historical drama, from 1967—made soon after the brutal Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising—reflects an implicit sense of outrage and revolt. The background facts of the story, set in 1919, concern the marauding vengeance of nationalist forces against members of the routed Red Army. The drama involves a former Communist who, while enjoying tenuous refuge with a pair of mysterious women and a modicum of protection from a friendly officer, faces a crisis of conscience. But the events depicted onscreen by Jancsó and the screenwriter Gyula Hernádi, are simply a terror campaign by armed officers against defenseless civilians, featuring summary executions, sexual depredations, wanton violence, deprivation of livelihoods, intrusive searches, and public interrogations. These furious doings are staged by Jancsó, a former law student, with his trademark gliding camera and exacting, analytical deployment of actors, as if he were reconstructing the scene of a crime. With a sly subversiveness, he reveals, with righteous vitriol, his country's ongoing plight. With the great character actor László Szabó, as an official who uses a camera to create official lies. In Hungarian.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; May 6-7 and May 9.)

SIN NOMBRE

This modest epic of immigration is heightened by the brilliant filmmaking of the director Cary Joji Fukunaga (it's his first feature film). The drama—featuring interwoven stories about Honduran teen-agers trying to emigrate to the U.S. by any means necessary (and ultimately facing off with Mexican gangs who rob and kill illegal immigrants on their way north)—is so vividly constructed that it achieves an almost thriller-like urgency. The cast of young, unknown actors (including Paulina Gaitan and Edgar Flores) is a gifted wild bunch, and the performances are rooted in a naturalistic display of emotions that never feels forced. The film is sometimes dark and brutal, but it has a measure of grace and classical composition (the wide-screen images are remarkable) that carry the story along to a moving conclusion. In Spanish.—*Bruce Diones* (In limited release.)

THE SOLOIST

A star reporter for the Los Angeles *Times*, Steve Lopez (Robert Downey, Jr.), befriends a classically trained musician, Nathaniel Ayers (Jamie Foxx), who suffers from schizophrenia and lives on the Los Angeles streets. Downey approaches him with a mixture of professional curiosity and practiced caution. In return, Foxx doesn't look at him much. Turning away, he talks rapidly and lightly, praising Beethoven, always Beethoven, complete with opus numbers. He's not dangerous, but he's not sane, either, and the filmmakers—the screenwriter Susannah Grant (adapting Lopez's book) and the director Joe Wright—don't pretend that friendship can cure madness or that great music can heal wounds that have been open for years. Wright flies over L.A.'s tangled freeways like the angels hovering over Berlin in "Wings of Desire," and he turns Nathaniel's attendance at rehearsals of the Los Angeles Philharmonic into a bliss-out. But then he comes back to earth. Outside a shelter, the director assembles what seems like every lost and wrecked person in the city and halts the story to let them tell their tales. They make their own kind of music. Most of the rest is from Beethoven's Third and Ninth Symphonies. It's hard to see how music and a sympathetic reporter can redeem a messy American city, but this movie makes a plausible case for so fervent a dream.—*D.D.* (4/27/09) (In wide release.)

EL SOPAR

Pace Mao, the revolution is, in fact, a dinner party, and the Catalan director Pere Portabella organized and filmed it in 1974. He gathered, at a rural villa, four men and a woman who had served jail terms, as political prisoners under the Franco regime, ranging from three to twenty-four years. The venue and the participants were unnamed, due to ongoing repression (the dinner took place the night of another political prisoner's execution), which lends the clandestine meeting an intrinsic edge of drama. The evening begins with their review of a previously recorded debate about communes (which they endorse with a hedged, humane realism), but soon moves to the heart of the matter: table talk about incarceration and the forms of resistance it invokes. Portabella, a master of dark irony, catches the sombre activists reflecting on the efficacy of a hunger strike in fighting "the enemy" (they're utterly aware that its sole value is the scandal that outside supporters can make of it). Then the conversation turns searingly intimate, as the eldest participant affirms that prison "annuls a person's personality" and a younger man describes the ideal delights he found in jail. Despite the serious talk, the festive setting is the point: the intended revolution is joyful, even hedonistic, and, though the evening closes on a terrible moment of silence, the end credits—added after Franco's death, in 1975—reveal the guests' identities and give them the last laugh. In Spanish and Catalan.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; May 8 and May 10.)

STATE OF PLAY

This dark-alley journalism story crossed with a suspense thriller and much else—such as adultery and conspiracy—is based on a six-hour BBC miniseries, and, despite some sharp dialogue and good acting, it doesn't add up to much. A crusading young congressman (a thinner Ben Affleck) is investigating a Blackwater-type private security company when his chief researcher, who is also his mistress, is pushed into the path of an oncoming subway train. The ace newspaper reporter Cal McAffrey (Russell Crowe), a close friend of the congressman's, gets on the case and uncovers the threat posed by the company, while his acidulous editor (Helen Mirren) wants to pursue the tabloid side of the scandal. Crowe is shapeless now, his complexion pasty, his hair long and lank. But there's enormous life in his eyes and voice. He seems every inch a great journalist; it's not his fault that the filmmakers let the story slip through their fingers. The three screenwriters (Matthew Michael Carnahan, Tony Gilroy, and Billy Ray) may have been trying to compress too much into two hours. With Jason Bateman, who is skittishly brilliant as a cynical public-relations guy who panics when he realizes he's in over his head, and Rachel McAdams, as a blogger who has to learn what real reporting is like. Kevin Macdonald, the director, displays a pleasant nostalgia for the scut work of newspaper reporting.—*D.D.* (4/27/09) (In wide release.)

SUGAR

There is, certainly, a great movie to be made about a young baseball player from the islands or South America who enters an American-run baseball academy, gets a tryout with a minor-league franchise, suffers the cultural dislocations of American wealth and strangeness, and then, on the verge of success, hits a rock somewhere and capsizes before he can get to the majors. This film, alas, is no more than the template for such a movie. The writer-director team of Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck want to overturn the usual

ROBERT PIERSANTI

triumphalist sports narrative, but the elements of their counter-narrative are sketched in without any particular conviction or strength. Algenis Perez Soto, as Miguel, the handsome and talented young Dominican pitcher, looks the part, but Miguel suffers nothing more than routine difficulties and setbacks. His pulling away from baseball is not determined by anything we see onscreen, and it feels like a misplaced cultural judgment—American capitalism, or something, did him in. Or are the filmmakers suggesting that Miguel is too hampered by guilt or vanity to succeed? Their message—that a good life can be had outside baseball—comes off as a dim and high-minded consolation prize. This is a tragic sports movie that shies away from every element of tragedy.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

VALENTINO: THE LAST EMPEROR
The opulent life style and fabulous haute-couture fashions of the great designer Valentino are presented in all their splendor in this documentary by Matt Tyrnauer. The film covers Valentino's final two years at work before his retirement and the grand forty-fifth-anniversary party, in 2007, celebrating his fashions. The film isn't a biography; Tyrnauer simply follows the designer around and captures the moments. And, between the life beyond luxury (the Roman villa, the French château, the yacht, the skiing in Gstaad) and the workers in his showroom (including his prickly genius seamstress and her assistants, who dress in white when handling the fabrics), there's plenty to choose from. But the film's main focus is Valentino's forty-five years with his business and life partner, Giancarlo Giammetti, whose attentiveness and devotion to the designer are sincerely moving. It's a stirring relationship, and Tyrnauer's film catches what genuinely feels like the end of an era. By the time we get to the party, for which the Colosseum is bathed in blue light as a backdrop for wire-dancing acrobats dressed in Valentino red, the Felliniesque-ness of it all can bring tears to our eyes.—*B.D.* (In limited release.)

X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

Also Playing

HANNAH MONTANA THE MOVIE: In wide release. **I LOVE YOU, MAN:** In wide release. **KNOWING:** In wide release. **OBSESSED:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—New York Polish Film Festival. All films are in Polish. For complete program information, visit www.nypff.com. May 6 at 6 and May 7 at 9:45: "The Offsiders" (2008, Kasia Adamik). ♦ May 8 at 9:30: "33 Scenes from Life" (2008, Malgorzata Szumowska). ♦ May 9 at 8:15: "Four Nights with Anna" (2008, Jerzy Skolimowski). ♦ In première. May 8 and May 11-13 at 7 and 9 and May 9-10 at 5, 7, and 9: "Audience of One" (2009, Michael Jacobs).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through May 21: "The Late Film." May 7 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Autumn Tale" (1998, Eric Rohmer; in French) and "Le Lion Volatile" (2003, Agnès Varda; in French). The 6:50 screening will be introduced by the writer Jonathan Baumbach. ♦ May 8 at 2 and 6:50: "Faat Kiné" (†). The 6:50 screening will be introduced by the critic Melissa Anderson. ♦ May 8 at 4:30 and 9:40: "Le Garçu" (†). ♦ May 9 at 2 and 6:50: "The Company" (2003, Robert Altman). ♦ May 9 at 4:30 and 9:15: "After the Rehearsal" (1984, Ingmar Bergman). ♦ May 10 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "L'Argent" (1983, Robert Bresson; in French). ♦ May 11 at 6:50 and 9:15: ". . . All the Marbles" (1981, Robert Aldrich). ♦ May 12 at 6:50 and 9:30: "The Age of Consent" (1969, Michael Powell).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. May 6-7: "Easy Rider" (1969, Dennis Hopper). ♦ May 8-9 at 1, 4:35, and 8:10: "I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang" (1932, Mervyn Le-Roy). ♦ May 8-9 at 2:50, 6:25, and 10: "The Criminal Code" (1931, Howard Hawks). ♦ May 10 at 1:30, 5:35, and 9:40 and May 11 at 2: "White Heat" (1949, Raoul Walsh). ♦ May 10 at 3:40 and 7:45 and May 11 at 4:10: "Angels with Dirty Faces" (1938, Michael Curtiz). ♦ May 12 at 1, 4, 7, and 10: "Ladies They Talk About" (1933, Howard Bretherton and William Keighley). ♦ May 12 at 2:25, 5:25, and 8:25: "Ladies of the Big House" (1931, Marion Gering).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—The films of Miklós Jancsó. All films are in Hungarian. May 6 at 1, May 7 at 6, and May 9 at 6:30: "The Round-up" (1966). ♦ May 6 at 3 and 6:40: "The Red and the White" (1967). ♦ May 6 at 5, May 7 at 4:15, and May 9 at 4:45: "Silence and Cry" (†). ♦ May 6 at 8:30 and May 7 at 2:15: "Red Psalm" (1972). ♦ "Clandestí: Forbidden Catalan Cinema Under Franco." May 8 at 1 and May 10 at noon: Program I, "Morality and Society." ♦ May 8 at 3:45 and May 10 at 2:45: Program II, "Countryside and the City: The Struggle to Make a Living." ♦ May 8 at 6:30 and May 10 at 5: Program III, "The Ongoing Political Struggle," including "El Sopar" (†). ♦ May 8 and May 10 at 9 and May 12 at 3:30: Program V, "Over the Edge: The Aesthetics of Outrage." ♦ May 9 at 8:30, May 10 at 6:45, and May 12 at 1:30: Program IV, "Aesthetic Subversion: Anarchy and Absurdity."

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"World Nomads Haiti." May 5 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "The Man by the Shore" (1993, Raoul Peck; in Creole and French).

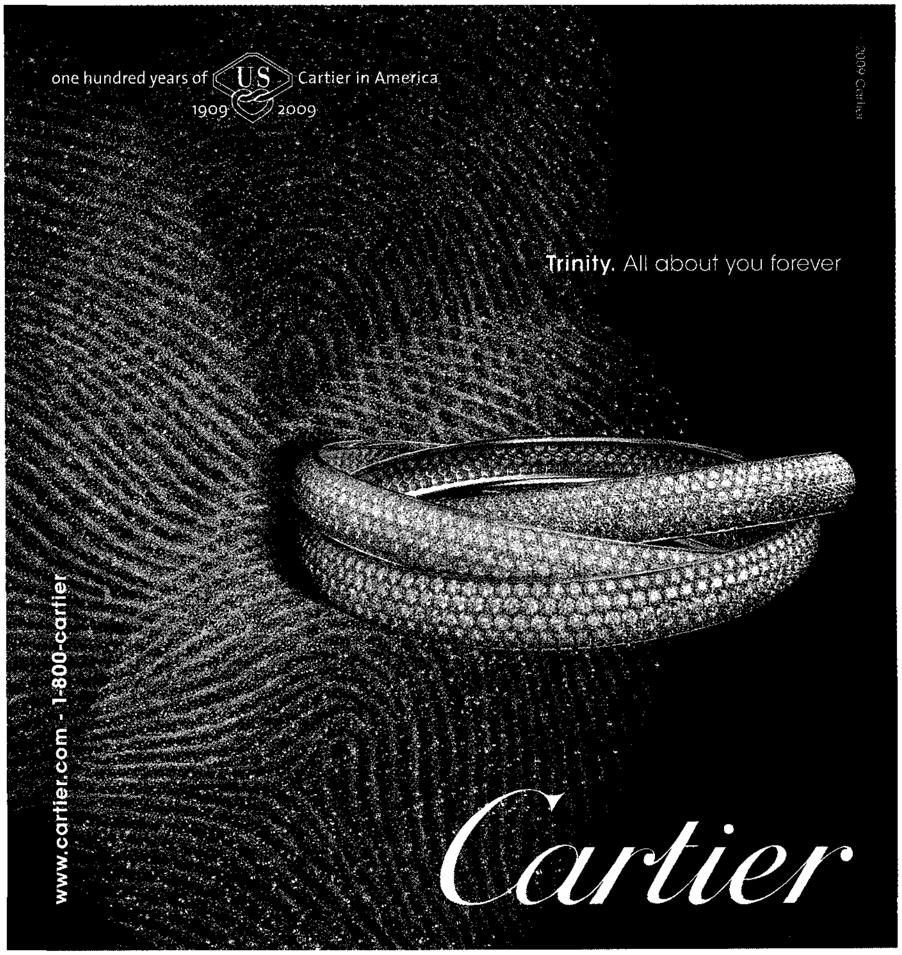
IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. May 8-10 at 11 A.M.: "Diary of a Country Priest" (1951, Robert Bresson; in French). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." May 8-9: "The Big Lebowski" (1998, Joel and Ethan Coen). The screening will feature a trivia contest, a costume contest, and other activities. ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. May 12 at 8: "Swimming to Cambodia" (1987, Jonathan Demme), introduced by the director.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"The Old West: Myth, Character, and Reinvention." May 6-7 at 1:30: "Tarzan and Jane Regained . . . Sort Of" (1964, Andy Warhol) and "Elvis at Ferus" (1963, Warhol). ♦ Through May 28: The films of Julien Duvivier. All films are in French. May 6 at 4:30: "A Man's Neck" (1933). ♦ May 7 at 4:30: "La Belle Équipe" (1936). ♦ May 8 at 4:30 and May 10 at 5: "La Bandera" (1935). ♦ May 9 at 1:30: "David Golder" (1930). ♦ "ImaginAsian." May 6 and May 8 at 6, May 7 at 8, May 9 at 4, and May 10 at 2: "Flower in the Pocket" (2007, Liew Seng Tat; in Mandarin and Malay). ♦ Through May 23: The films of Kim Longinotto. May 7 at 8: "Rough Aunties" (2009). ♦ May 8 at 8: "Divorce Iranian Style" (1998). ♦ May 9 at 7:30: "Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go" (2007). ♦ May 10 at 5:30: "The Day I Will Never Forget" (2002).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." May 8 at 9:30: "Persona" (1965, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish), introduced by Liv Ullmann.

READINGS AND TALKS

PUBLIC ART FUND TALKS
The multimedia artist Cory Arcangel discusses his work. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. May 6 at 6:30. For more information, visit www.publicartfund.org.)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THE HAPPY ENDING SERIES @ JOE'S PUB
The downtown music-and-reading series continues with the writers Wells Tower, John Wray, and Arthur Phillips. The musical guest is Vampire Weekend. (425 Lafayette St. 212-539-8777. May 6 at 7.)

HUNTER COLLEGE
The British-based Pakistani novelist Kamila Shamsie, who was recently short-listed for the Orange Prize for Fiction, reads from her novel "Burnt Shadows." (Faculty Dining Room, 8th fl., West Building, Lexington Ave. at 68th St. For reservations, which are required, call 212-772-4007. May 6 at 7:30.)

BOOKCOURT
The literary journal *upstreet* presents the poets Nicole Cooley, Alan Feldman, Jeffrey Harrison, Michael O'Brien, Jean Valentine, and Bill Zavatsky. (163 Court St., Brooklyn, 718-875-3677. May 7 at 7.)

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Michael Smith and Paul McMahon, two performance artists with a comic sensibility whose work dates back to the seventies and eighties, present some of their favorite pieces from back in the day. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-396-5460. May 10 at 2.)

GALAPAGOS
Ben Greenman, an editor at this magazine, celebrates the release of his new novel, "Please Step Back," by talking about music and writing with *The New Yorker's* pop-music critic Sasha Frere-Jones. Note: The first seventy-two people to arrive during the first hour dressed as if they stepped out of the early seventies (a key era for the book) will receive a free cocktail and a copy of the novel. (16 Main St., at Water St., Brooklyn. 718-222-8500. May 12 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

BROOKLYN HEIGHTS HOUSE TOUR
The arrival of Robert Fulton's steam ferry in 1814 helped turn Brooklyn's riverside farmland into one of the city's most beautiful neighborhoods. Wealthy merchants drawn by the area's sudden accessibility (one developer, Hezekiah Pierpont, described his property as "the nearest country retreat") constructed elegant brownstone and brick homes in Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, and other popular architectural styles of the day. In 1965, thanks to the efforts of preservation-minded residents, the neighborhood became the city's first Historic District, and each year the Brooklyn Heights Association organizes a self-guided house and garden tour. This year's tour, which includes five historic residences, is scheduled for May 9, from 1 to 5. (For more information, call 718-858-9193, or visit www.brooklynheightsassociation.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
After concluding its day sales of Impressionist and modern art (May 6), **Sotheby's** moves on to contemporary art works, starting with an evening sale (May 12) comprised of a tight selection of forty-nine works led by a giant egg wrapped in what looks like blue tinfoil by the inevitable Jeff Koons ("Baroque Egg with Bow"). It will share the podium with a vibrant, neo-primitivist canvas of a figure with an empty, mask-like gaze by Jean-Michel Basquiat ("Red Man One") and a striking mechanistic anthropomorphic construction in welded steel by David Smith "Large Circle (Voltri)." (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Close on the heels of Sotheby's, **Christie's** presents its own evening sale of Impressionist and modern art (May 6). No one quite knows how collectors will be feeling, but the house is hoping that they will be tempted by such works as Picasso's "Mousquetaire à la Pipe" (timed perfectly to go on sale while the Gagosian gallery has a well-received show of the artist's late musketeer paintings) and his "Femme au Chapeau," an androgynous figure wearing a fetching green hat, from the collection of Julian Schnabel. The sale also features a bronze figure of a fallen warrior by Henry Moore as well as several works from the collection of the late Caral Gimbel Lebworth, including a bust by Giacometti, "Buste de Diego (Stele III)." Two day sales follow on May 7. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ The bookish **Bloomsbury** house presents an auction of an altogether different sort on May 6, offering the collection of the bookworm Paula Peyraud, who worked for many years as a reference librarian and head of technical services at the Chappaqua Public Library. Her passion was for Samuel Johnson and the women writers of the Georgian period, such as the Burneys (Fanny and Frances) and, of course, Jane Austen. Peyraud's collection includes letters, manuscripts, portraits, and watercolors, as well as many first editions. (6 W. 48th St. 212-719-1000.)

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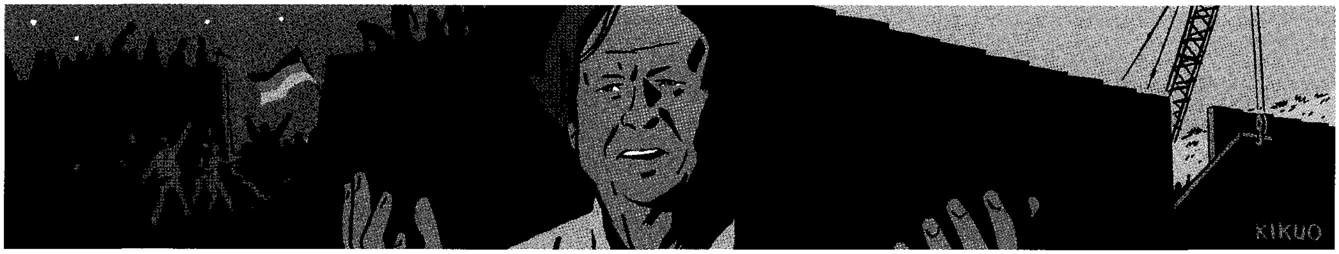
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE
BRICK BY BRICK
May 14–17

At the Public, David Hare performs two of his monologues. "Berlin" considers the German city twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall; "Wall" examines the Israel/Palestine security fence. Stephen Daldry directs. (212-967-7555.)

ART
GREEN-SPIRITED
May 14–Jan. 4

The Nature Conservancy challenged ten innovators in the worlds of fashion and design to turn organic materials into museum-worthy objects. The results—including Isaac Mizrahi's Alaskan-salmon-skin dress and Maya Lin's undulating bench of red maple—will be exhibited in "Design for a Living World," at the Cooper-Hewitt. (212-849-8400.)

NIGHT LIFE
SOUTHERN NIGHTS
May 19–24

The New Orleans R. & B. legend Allen Toussaint just released "The Bright Mississippi," his first solo record in more than ten years. A smoldering instrumental collection of jazz standards and Big Easy fare, it was produced by Joe Henry. Toussaint performs at the Village Vanguard. (212-255-4037.)

MOVIES
RUSSIAN REVOLUTION
May 21–24

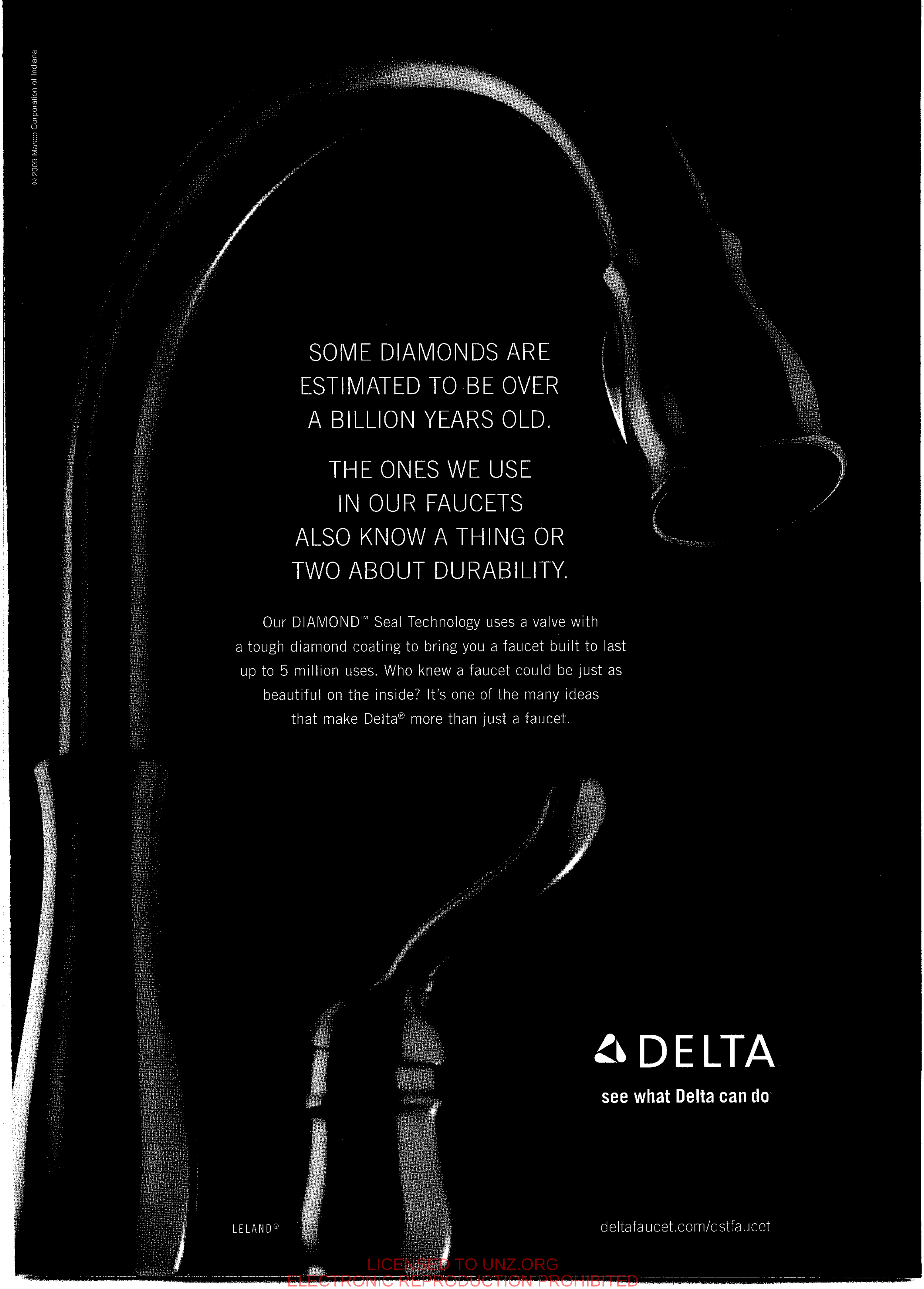
In conjunction with the publication of "Imperial Trace: Recent Russian Cinema," by the film historian Nancy Condee, Anthology Film Archives presents works she discusses, including Alexander Sokurov's "Alexandra," set in Chechnya; Aleksei German's "My Friend Ivan Lapshin," which the Soviet Union banned for fourteen years; and "Cargo 200," Aleksei Balabanov's drama about a serial killer. (212-505-5181.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
MAAZEL TOV!
June 4–9

Lorin Maazel's final month as music director of the Philharmonic concludes with Mahler's "Symphony of a Thousand," but it begins on a more modest scale with an appealing program of concertos by Copland and Aaron Jay Kernis. (212-875-5656.)

David Hare's monologues, at the Public.

R: KIKUO JOHNSON



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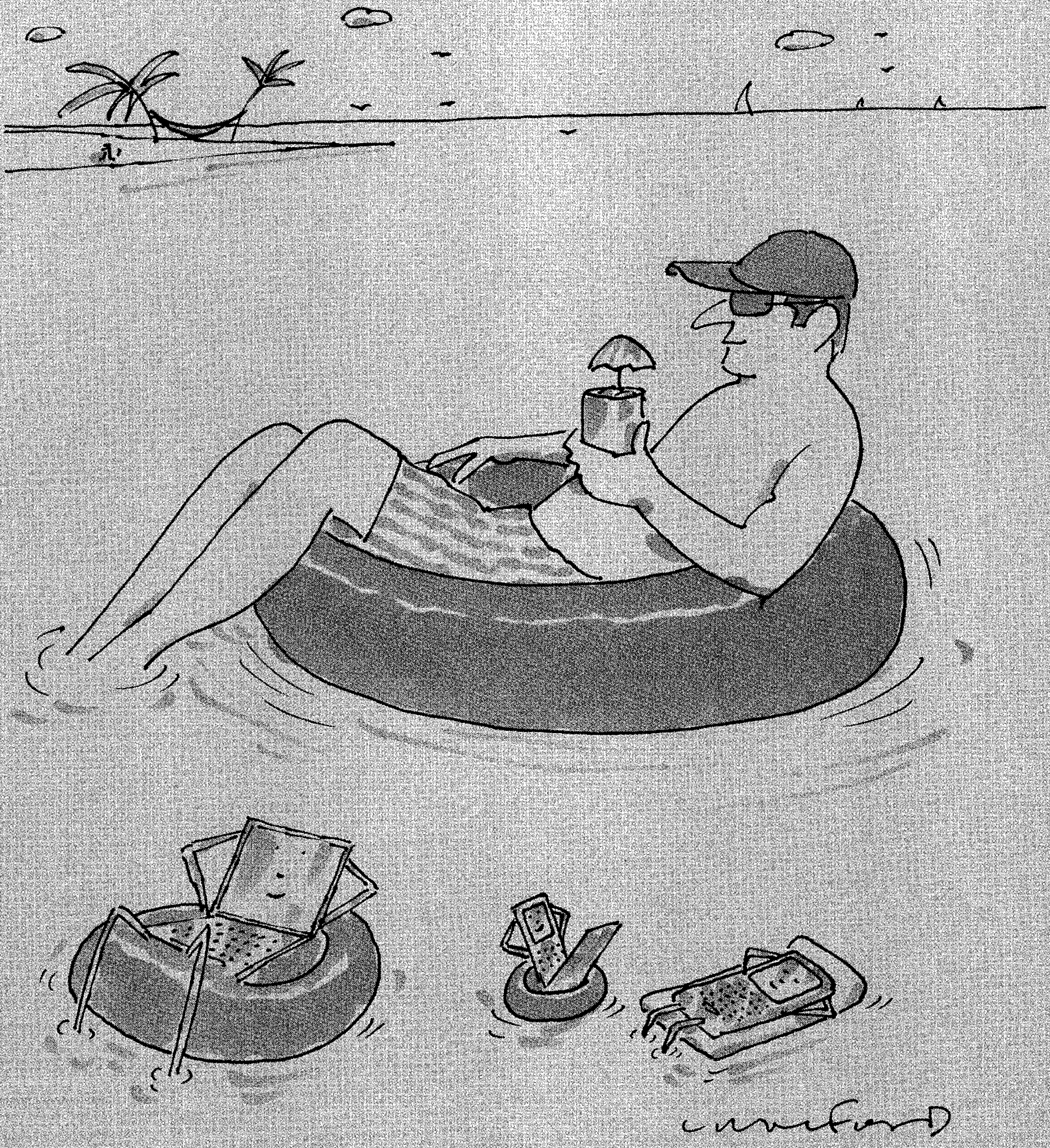

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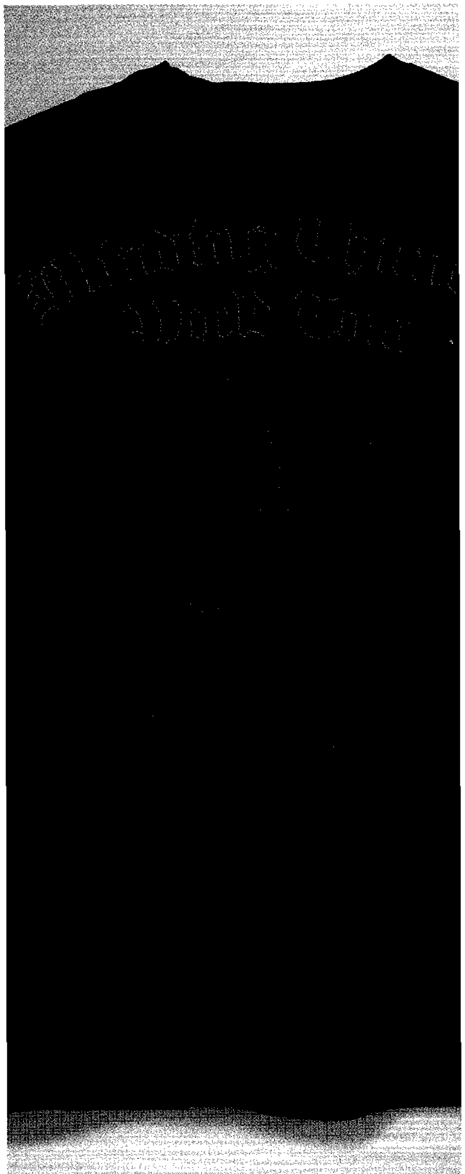

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THE
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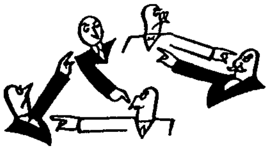
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
INTERROGATING TORTURE



On November 14, 2003, at Abu Ghraib prison, on the outskirts of Baghdad, six hooded Iraqi prisoners accused by their American jailers of trying to start a riot were brought to the Military Intelligence cellblock and handed over to Corporal Charles A. Graner, Jr., the military-police officer in charge of the night shift. Graner noted in the M.P. logbook that he had instructions from a lieutenant colonel to strip the newcomers, and to subject them to a routine of rough calisthenics designed to disorient, exhaust, terrify, and humiliate them, and to cause them pain. This was standard practice on the M.I. block, and Graner set to work. When one of the prisoners resisted, Graner later told Army investigators, "I bashed him against the wall." Running hooded prisoners into walls was also standard practice at Abu Ghraib, but this prisoner fell to the floor, and blood ran out from under his hood, and a medic was summoned. In the logbook, Graner wrote that the prisoner required eight stitches on his chin. He helped sew the stitches himself, and he had one of his soldiers photograph the bloodstained scene.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Graner clearly felt that he had nothing to hide. When his company commander, Captain Christopher Brinson, and one of Brinson's deputies, Master Sergeant Brian Lipinski, stopped by, Graner said, he made the other prisoners crawl to their cells while Brinson and Lipinski watched. Graner also said that, in addition to medics and his superior officers, lawyers from the Judge Advocate General's Corps frequently visited the cellblock and saw the abuse that went on there. Graner interpreted their presence to be "implied consent that this was all O.K.," he said. In fact, two days later, Brinson, who in civilian life is a top aide to Representative Mike Rogers, Republican of Alabama, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, issued a Developmental Counselling Form to Graner. Such a form is normally used for reprimands, but what Brinson wrote sounded more like a commendation: "CPL Graner, you are doing a fine job. . . . You have received many accolades. . . . Continue to perform at this level and it will help us succeed at our overall mission."

That story comes to mind as Americans are seized by belated outrage over the Bush Administration's policy of practicing torture against prisoners in the war on terror. It was exactly five years ago that some of the photographs that Charles Graner and his comrades took at Abu Ghraib were aired on CBS's "Sixty Minutes" and published in this magazine. At that time, the Administration claimed that Graner was the mastermind of the abuse represented in the photographs, and that they showed nothing more than the depravity of a group of rogue soldiers who had fallen under his sway. Yet it became almost immediately apparent—and has been confirmed repeatedly in the years since, most recently with President Obama's decision to release four Bush Administration memorandums seeking to establish a legal justification for the use of torture—that the Abu Ghraib photographs showed not individuals run amok but American policy in action. (From those memos, we now know that Bush Administration lawyers had a technical term for what Charles Graner called bashing a man against a wall. The term is "walling.")

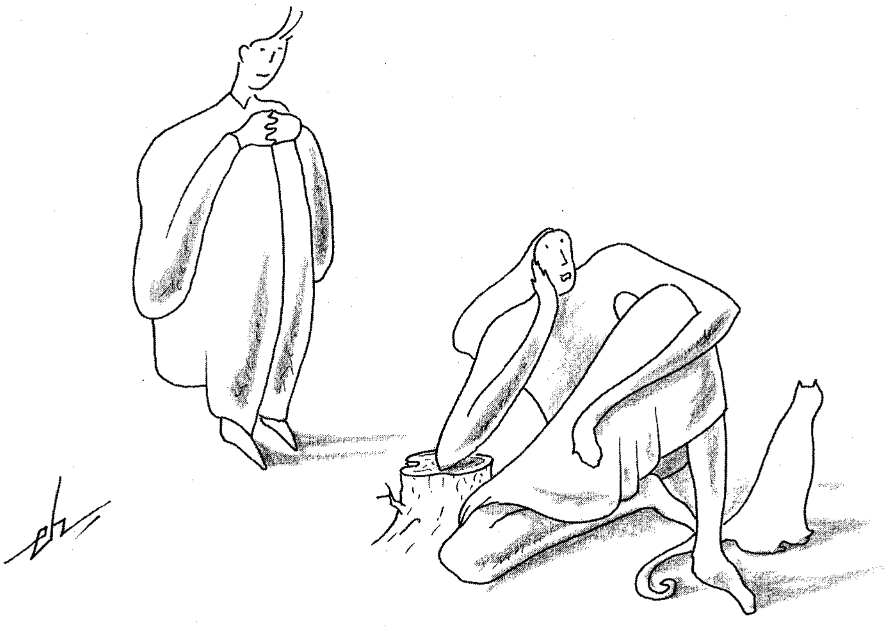
The natural first reaction on seeing the photographs of American soldiers torturing Iraqi prisoners in Saddam Hussein's old dungeons was to ask: Why are we doing such things to *them*? With time, however, Americans have come increasingly to understand that it is equally appropriate to ask: Why are we doing such things to ourselves? Why dismantle the laws that have made our country worth fighting and dying for against states that torture? Former Vice-President Dick Cheney has said that we must torture because it is effective. That is, at best, a false argument: a crime is not absolved just because it works. (After all, terrorism can be effective.) President Obama, in his press conference last week, cut through the noise to the essence of the issue. Torture, he said, “corrodes the character of a country.”

America is now embroiled in a debate about how, or whether, to hold the true masterminds—the former President, the former Vice-President, the former Defense Secretary, and their top lawyers—to account for their criminal policies. Here, we are on uncharted ground. As a rule, the war-crimes prosecutions of the past century were conducted by a group of states, acting collectively, against the (usually defeated) leaders of another state. When states hold their own leaders to account, it tends to happen not after an election but after a revolution, when the very premise of the ancien régime is treated as criminal. Furthermore, prosecution and punishment are not necessarily the best means to eradicate the rot from a political system, because in adjudicating systemic crimes political compromise is inevitable. It is practically impossible, and politically intolerable, to contemplate holding to account every corrupted officer in the chains of command that ran between the White House and the guardhouse at Abu Ghraib or at Bagram Airbase. A full and public reckoning of the historical record might be less cathartic but would ultimately be more valuable than a few sensational trials.

In any event, President Obama, who has taken a courageous lead in bringing the issue of torture to light, and in insisting on recriminalizing it, appears to have no interest in taking any of the policymakers to court—though he has not precluded doing so. Still, to date the only Americans who have been prosecuted and sentenced to imprisonment for the criminal policies that emanated from the highest levels are ten low-ranking servicemen and women—those who took and appeared in the Abu Ghraib photographs, and embarrassed the nation by showing us what we were doing there. Charles Graner is the only one remaining in prison, serving ten years. His superior officers enjoy their freedom, and C.I.A. interrogators, who spent years committing far worse acts against prisoners than Graner did even in the darkest days at Abu Ghraib, have been assured immunity.

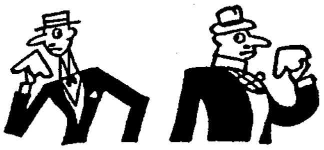
But, if full justice remains impossible, surely some injustices can be corrected. Whenever crimes of state are adjudicated—at Nuremberg or The Hague, Phnom Penh or Kigali—the principle of command responsibility, whereby the leaders who give the orders are held to a higher standard of accountability than the foot soldiers who follow, pertains. There can be no restoration of the national honor if we continue to scapegoat those who took the fall for an Administration—and for us all.

—*Philip Gourevitch*



“Oh, no, I just remembered that from dust we cometh, and to dust we goeth, and just when you think it’s gonna get warm—it snoweth.”

POSTCARD FROM MEXICO
STANDSTILL



One of the larger consequences of the government’s efforts to contain the spread of the swine-influenza virus here in Mexico City is tedium. Mexicans are generally festive people, and now that the city government has closed down restaurants, bars, and night clubs there is no place to share a couple of drinks and a few jokes about the current dreadful situation. What is more, people have become afraid of one another.

“We don’t see anyone,” a very pregnant friend complained. “We’re all afraid of contagion.” In the days since the news of the epidemic broke, she had caught up on all her work, paid the bills, changed the haircut of her toddler daughter—whose kindergarten has also been closed down—and was about to take some photographs of her own belly. There’s a small park outside her building, but, like all the other mothers, she was afraid to use it. “Am I bored?” she exclaimed. “*Muchísimo!* I imagine people all over the city locked up in their apartments, staring into the mirror, plucking their eyebrows down to nothing.”

There is the boredom, and, for millions of wage earners, there is also desperate economic worry. Ángeles Melo manages a restaurant catering to office workers. The government has allowed restaurants to provide carryout service, but business is slow. Her clients tell her that they aren’t allowed to eat at their desks. “So where are they supposed to take their food?” Melo said. “I delivered a *torta* here and there, but it doesn’t add up to an income.” Her one waitress, Josefina Martínez, was in worse shape. Like most service employees, she gets paid the minimum wage—fifty-five pesos (four dollars) a day—plus what, on

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[1] UNAIDS, *2007 AIDS Epidemic Update*
[2] *FORTUNE*, March 2009
[3] *Ethisphere® Magazine*, June 2008

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a good day, might be two hundred and fifty pesos (eighteen dollars) in tips, enough to contribute to her family's household expenses and cover her transportation. Now she can barely afford to come to work. Melo, asked how long she could hold out like this, looked panicked. "I wouldn't like it to go past next week," she said.

Like Melo, the country is in terrible financial shape: according to the Banco de Mexico, the economy could contract by as much as 4.8 per cent this year. Last week, the Finance Secretary, Agustín Carstens, revealed that he expected a further drop, of 0.5 per cent, as a result of the flu. And then there is the cost of the epidemic, which would be enormous even if the country had a top-of-the-line public-health system. In Naucalpan, a ghastly industrial city across the street from the Mexico City limits, officials have not taken the same stringent prevention measures as the capital has—thus rendering Mexico City's efforts all but useless, one would think. Naucalpan has a large hospital for insured workers, but the Red Cross facility that attends to the uninsured is small and bare-bones. Consequently, the director, Dr. José Antonio García Padilla, was thankful that so far he had seen only one likely flu patient. He stressed that he had reported the case to the state health authorities.

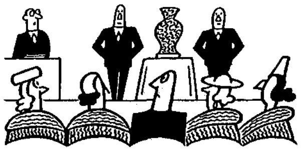
Some states might be underreporting the figures in order to avoid the kind of body blow to their economy that Mexico City has suffered. The state of Quintana Roo, for example, has not confirmed a single case of swine flu, even though many patients abroad got sick after vacationing in the state's best-known city, Cancún. But this kind of dissembling is pointless; tourism, which is Mexico's third-largest source of foreign income, after oil and remittances, is already in rigor mortis.

It is slowly dawning on everyone that the current situation is likely to drag on for a long time, and there is a rancor in the air, a feeling that Mexicans are being persecuted by a nasty and arbitrary god. Even the Health Secretary, José Ángel Córdova Villalobos, a calm man who looks as if he hadn't slept in weeks, appeared mildly querulous at a press conference the other night. "I don't know why it's being called the Mexican swine flu," he said, when, actually, the virus's genome matches a Euro-Asiatic strain. He looked as if he could use a hug, but the guidelines set out by his ministry urge citizens to refrain from giving any.

—Alma Guillermoprieto

RELICS

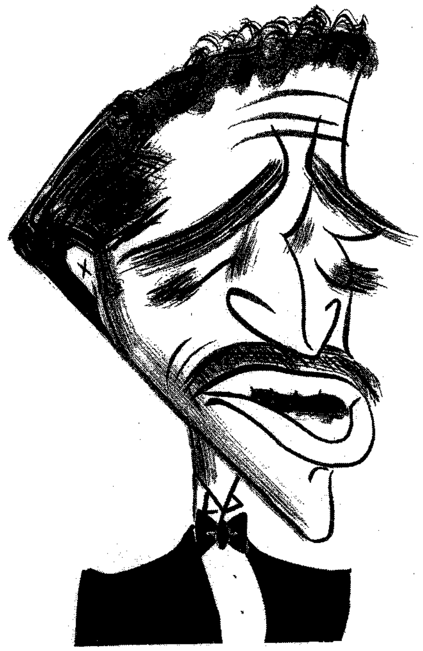
SAMELA'S SHAMMASH



If there is a Heaven, and Sammy Davis, Jr., is looking down from it, he's probably distressed about the state of his earthly possessions. "He was meticulous," Burt Boyar, Davis's friend and a co-writer of Davis's autobiography, "Yes I Can," said recently. "He shined his own shoes. When he was trying on a suit, he would take it off and put it in the laundry just for having tried it on." But when Davis died, in 1990, his finances, it turned out, weren't as well ordered as his closets (he owed more than five million dollars to the I.R.S.), and his things were auctioned off: a white satin jumpsuit with matching boots ($825); a "Mod Squad" script ($412.50); sixteen wooden canes ($3,575); a Snoopy calendar ($880); a Mr. Bojangles costume ($2,750); a "Planet of the Apes" sculpture ($2,750); a signed letter from Richard Nixon ($1,430).

One object from the sale is about to be put on the block again. It is Davis's sterling-silver menorah, 12.3 inches tall, with an inscription on its base. On one side it says, "WOMEN'S DIVISION FEDERATION JEWISH PHILANTHROPIES TUESDAY NOVEMBER 23, 1965 HOTEL ASTOR." And, on the other, "TO SAMMY DAVIS JR WHOSE ACHIEVEMENTS WON BY COURAGE AND INTEGRITY SAY TO EVERY MAN YES, WE CAN." Boyar said that Davis had a lot of similar memorabilia, since he did many events for Jewish philanthropies. (Ernest Michel, who has worked at the United Jewish Appeal Federation for more than fifty years, missed the presentation, but said that Davis had performed for the group in Las Vegas, and "everybody loved that guy.") Davis converted to Judaism after he lost his left eye in a car accident, in 1954; the comedian Eddie Cantor had got him interested in the religion. Davis was serious about his faith, and "Yes I Can" is full of instances in which he uses jokes to defuse people's skepticism. (His favorite was a response to the question "What's your golf handicap?" "I'm a colored, one-eyed Jew—do I need anything else?") In one scene in the book, the radio host Barry Gray talks to Davis:

> "Is it true that you've become a Jew?"
>
> A hush fell over the restaurant. The people were leaning in, listening. "Yes, Barry, I am a Jew."
>
> He extended his hand. "Welcome aboard, lantzman. . . . I've heard it said that you wanted to be a Jew because all your friends are Jewish."
>
> "Barry, Frank Sinatra is my closest friend and I never yet saw him wear a *yamalka*. I'll admit he eats a bagel every now and then."



Sammy Davis, Jr.

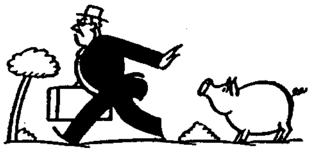
Boyar said, "I called him on Yom Kippur once, and he wouldn't take my call. He called me the next day and said, 'I'm sorry, I thought you were going to talk about business.' " He always lit the candles during Hanukkah.

The menorah will be sold next month at an auction held by the dealer Jonathan Greenstein, at the Radisson Martinique hotel. The sale consists of Jewish antiques: eighteenth-century French candleholders ($40,000), handmade silver kiddush cups ($1,000 and up). The most noteworthy items are a silver Torah crown and an eighteenth-century silver-and-diamond pointer (used for reading the Torah), which are being sold by the family of the late Rabbi Alexander Schindler, most of whose savings were invested with Bernie Madoff. The bidding on Davis's menorah will start at ten thousand dollars. For the past five years, the menorah has been kept in a safe-deposit box on Staten Island, the property of an electrical contractor named Tommy Gelb, who bought it as part of a mixed lot, for which he paid fifty thousand dollars, in 2004. Gelb is not a Sammy Davis, Jr., fan. He explained, the other day, "I am a collector of spice boxes"—another ritual object, used to mark the end of the Sabbath. Gelb had been planning to sell the menorah to his brother, but, he said, his brother has been slow to make an offer. "If I wait until he makes up his mind, it'll be eight more years." He has his eye on a spice box, so he decided to unload the menorah.

In the meantime, the menorah can be viewed at J. Greenstein & Company, in Gravesend. To get there, take the F train to King's Highway, and look for a building with a sign out front that says "Mercy Home Care." There may be a guy in a Dan Marino jersey standing in a doorway, and, if you tell him you're looking for a dealer of Judaica called J. Greenstein & Company, he'll say, "Nope. This is a medical-supply company." Ignore him, and go up a flight of stairs to the second floor, where you will find a room in which rows of clerks, mostly women, are typing at metal desks near shelves of gauze, ointments, and colostomy bags. This is Jonathan Greenstein's medical-supply business. ("Selling menorahs is great," he says, "but it doesn't support five children.") Greenstein is the laid-back, pear-shaped guy in an office in back. He will explain that he has put on a lot of weight since he quit smoking, and then he will ask, jokingly, "Do you smoke? Aren't cigarettes delicious? They're so unbelievably good, and I'm so fat and disgusting." Sammy Davis, Jr.,'s menorah is in a lower drawer of his desk. It's light, like a kid's soccer trophy, and it has two plastic rubies on its base. Greenstein has one of his regular clients in mind for it—"He lives in Connecticut, and he is very excited about Jews and show business"—but he says it could go to anyone: you, for example, if you want to enter the bidding. Greenstein is a Grateful Dead fan (he's been to around twenty shows), and he is fond of the menorah. He hopes that, in its next home, "it will be admired and appreciated and loved, just like I'm sure it was when it belonged to Sammy."

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

SOW'S EAR DEPT.
BY ANY OTHER NAME



Last week, there were a lot of questions about swine flu, not the least of which was what to call it. An Israeli health minister, loath to utter the words, attempted to rename the virus the "Mexican flu." The hog farmers and the pork processors proposed the "North American influenza," while the North American politicians were pushing "the H1N1 virus," a designation that Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack—a Democrat, not incidentally, from Iowa—said he deemed "very, very important." By Wednesday, it was official: the swine flu, according to the federal government, was no longer the swine flu; it was the "2009 H1N1 Flu." In a hearing before the Health and Human Services subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Senator Tom Harkin, another Iowan, had expressed to Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, his own confusion:

> HARKIN: Dr. Fauci, in my opening statement I kept referring to it as the so-called swine flu. Now, please instruct me in this. I've been told that it doesn't necessarily come from pigs. . . . But it has a swine gene? . . .
>
> FAUCI: This particular virus, this H1N1 we're calling "swine flu," has genetic elements from a human influenza, genetic elements from a pig influenza, and genetic elements from an avian influenza. . . .
>
> HARKIN: I've heard that a more correct terminology for this might be a Northern American virus.
>
> FAUCI (*smiling uncomfortably*): Well . . . I wouldn't want to go there, Senator.

Swine flu. *Febbre suina. Schweinegrippe.* However you said it, there was something discomfiting about the phrase, which somehow sounded both Biblical and futuristic, as though it were the humanity-annihilating plague in a Will Smith film. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "swine" derives from the Old English *swin,* referring to bristle-bearing, non-ruminant hoofed mammals, and the perceived qualities thereof, almost none of which are salutary. In Chaucer, a noblewoman berates a group of beggars: "masty swyn, ye ydel wrechches, Ful of roten, slowe techches!" Drunkards and slobs, along with the potentates of the Catholic Church—"that lecherous swyne the Byschop of Rome"—were objects of the opprobrium. Shakespeare associates the word with intemperance—"Oh, monstrous beast, how like a swine he lyes," a lord says of the sodden tinker Christopher Sly—while, in Walter Scott's "Kenilworth," a character boasts, "He that does me not reason is a swine of Sussex, and I'll make him kneel to the pledge, if I should cut his hams, and smoke them for bacon."

In more recent years, at least judging from a search of the *Post* archives, cads, thugs, molesters, and swindlers have most frequently elicited what the paper might call the porcine pejorative. Jeanine Pirro's husband, Al, out to eat with another woman: "SWINE DINING." Joel Steinberg, leaving prison in a white stretch limo: "SWINE ON BOARD." Before the flu broke out, readers encountered "jail swine"; a "Serb swine" who beat up a Brooklyn college student; a seventy-one-year-old alleged groper called a "psycho-swine"; Pirro, again; and a story about a sculptor who had immortalized Bernie Madoff "by turning the swine into a piggy bank." In the *Observer,* as Bear Stearns imploded, a columnist channelled the class resentment of a junior associate at the firm: "The Bear credo was to work that much harder than the other banks . . . above all to beat the other bank, to beat the fucking swine white shoes."

"Swine": a word that encompasses, in a single syllable, decades of greed and entitlement. In darker psyches, the thought lurked: was the pandemic some sort of cosmic comeuppance for our collective swinishness, a funk for our profligate times? It was a paranoid thought, and a pretty nonsensical one, but it was not assuaged by a glitch on the Web page that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had dedicated to tracking the disease: New York City, with forty-five laboratory cases confirmed, was listed, alongside California, Kansas, Ohio, and Texas, as its own state.

—*Lauren Collins*

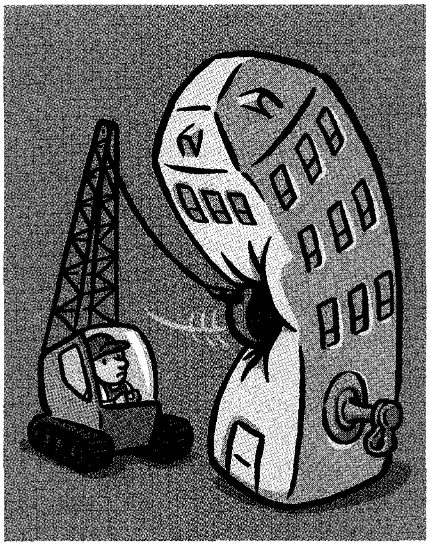
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
MONSTERS, INC.

Amid the blizzard of economic data that the government puts out every week, last Tuesday's report analyzing G.D.P. industry by industry got little notice. But it contained one very interesting piece of data: in 2008, for the first time in sixteen years, the finance and insurance industry shrank. Since 1980, this sector's share of the economy has grown by almost half. Now, apparently, the worm has turned.

For many, this comes as a welcome development: the size of the banking industry has become a symbol of the much lamented "financialization" of the U.S. economy over the past thirty years, and of what the M.I.T. economist Simon Johnson has called a "quiet coup" by Wall Street. But, while banking has become a hypertrophied monster, we still need to understand how the industry got so big in the first place in order to right-size it. And although bad policy and regulatory somnambulism have something to do with it, much of the industry's growth has been driven by major changes in the economy as a whole, rather than vice versa.

The desire to bring back the boring, small banking industry of the nineteen-fifties is understandable. Unfortunately, the only way to do that would be to bring back the economy of the fifties, too. Banking was boring then because the economy was boring. The financial sector's most important job is channelling money from investors to businesses that need capital for worthwhile investment. But in the postwar era there wasn't much need for this. The economy, while remarkably strong, was dominated by huge companies that faced little competition, and could finance investments out of their profits. And entrepreneurship was restrained: there were many fewer start-ups then than in the period after 1980. So the financial sector didn't have much to do.

Two things changed this. First, in the seventies those huge companies started tottering, while the U.S. economy fell apart. Second, the corporate world was transformed by revolutionary developments in information technology and by the emergence of new industries like cable television, wireless, and biotechnology. This meant that the economy became, and has remained, far more competitive, while corporate performance became far more volatile. In the nineteen-eighties, companies moved in and out of the Fortune 500 twice as fast as they had in the fifties and sixties. Suddenly, there were lots of new companies with big appetites for outside capital, which they needed in order to keep growing. And it was Wall Street that helped them get it. Companies like Turner Broadcasting, M.C.I., and McCaw Cellular used junk bonds to turn themselves into major businesses. Venture-capital investing took off, and so did the I.P.O. market; there were twice as many I.P.O.s between 1980 and 1999 as there were between 1960 and 1979. To be sure, deregulation was also a factor, but Thomas Philippon, an economist at N.Y.U., has shown that most of the increase in the size of the financial sector in this period can be accounted for by companies' need for new capital.



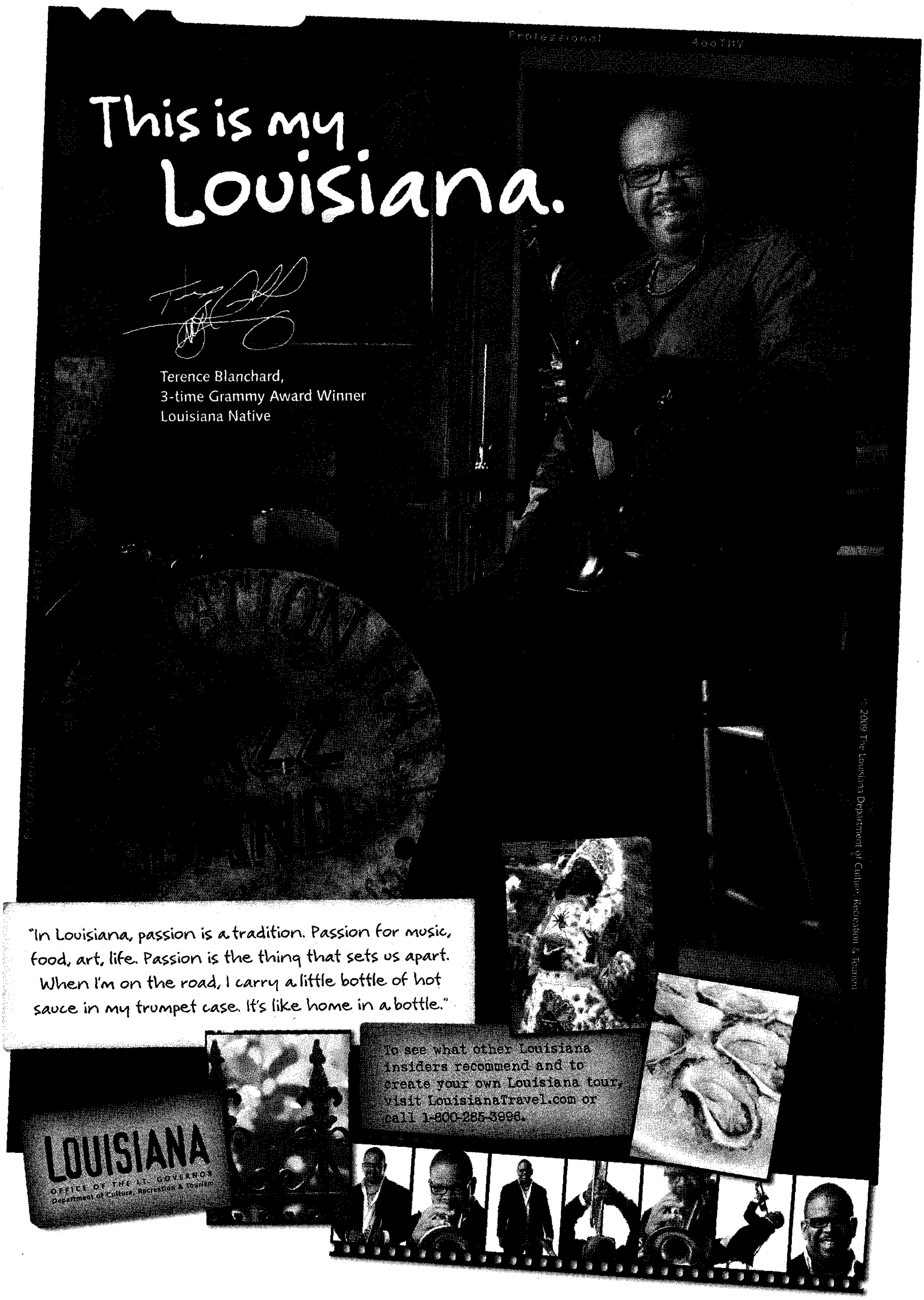
This wasn't the first time that something like this had happened. There have been three big banking booms in modern U.S. history. The first began in the late nineteenth century, during the Second Industrial Revolution, when bankers like J. P. Morgan funded the creation of industrial giants like U.S. Steel and International Harvester. The second wave came in the twenties, as electrification transformed manufacturing, and the modern consumer economy took hold. The third wave accompanied the information-technology revolution. Each wave, Philippon shows, was propelled by the need to fund new businesses, and each left finance significantly bigger than before. In all these cases, it wasn't so much that the bankers had changed; the world had.

The same can't be said, though, of the boom of the past decade. The housing bubble was unique, and uniquely awful. Each of the previous waves had come in response to a profound shift in the real economy. With the housing bubble, by contrast, there was no meaningful development in the real economy that could explain why homes were suddenly so much more attractive or valuable. The only thing that had changed, really, was that banks were flinging cheap money at would-be homeowners, essentially conjuring up profits out of nowhere. And while previous booms (at least, those of the twenties and the nineties) did end in tears, along the way they made the economy more productive and more innovative in a lasting way. That's not true of the past decade. Banking grew bigger and more profitable. But all we got in exchange was acres of empty houses in Phoenix.

There's no doubt that the financial sector needs to be smaller; Philippon suggests that, given the demands of businesses for capital, a normal financial sector would be about the size it was in 1996. Besides just shrinking the industry, though, we have the harder task of making credit bubbles like the one we just lived through less likely. That will require limiting the ability of banks to rely on vast amounts of leverage, which clearly increases risk without adding social value. Many financial innovations also seem to be overrated; it's not clear that they actually help finance do its core job of channelling capital to businesses. The most important change, though, may be something harder to legislate: Wall Street needs to recognize that its proper role is, as it has been in the past, to follow the real economy, rather than trying to drive it. During the housing bubble, the financial sector essentially tried to create reality. Now's the time for it to respond to reality instead.

—James Surowiecki

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN



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ANNALS OF INNOVATION

HOW DAVID BEATS GOLIATH

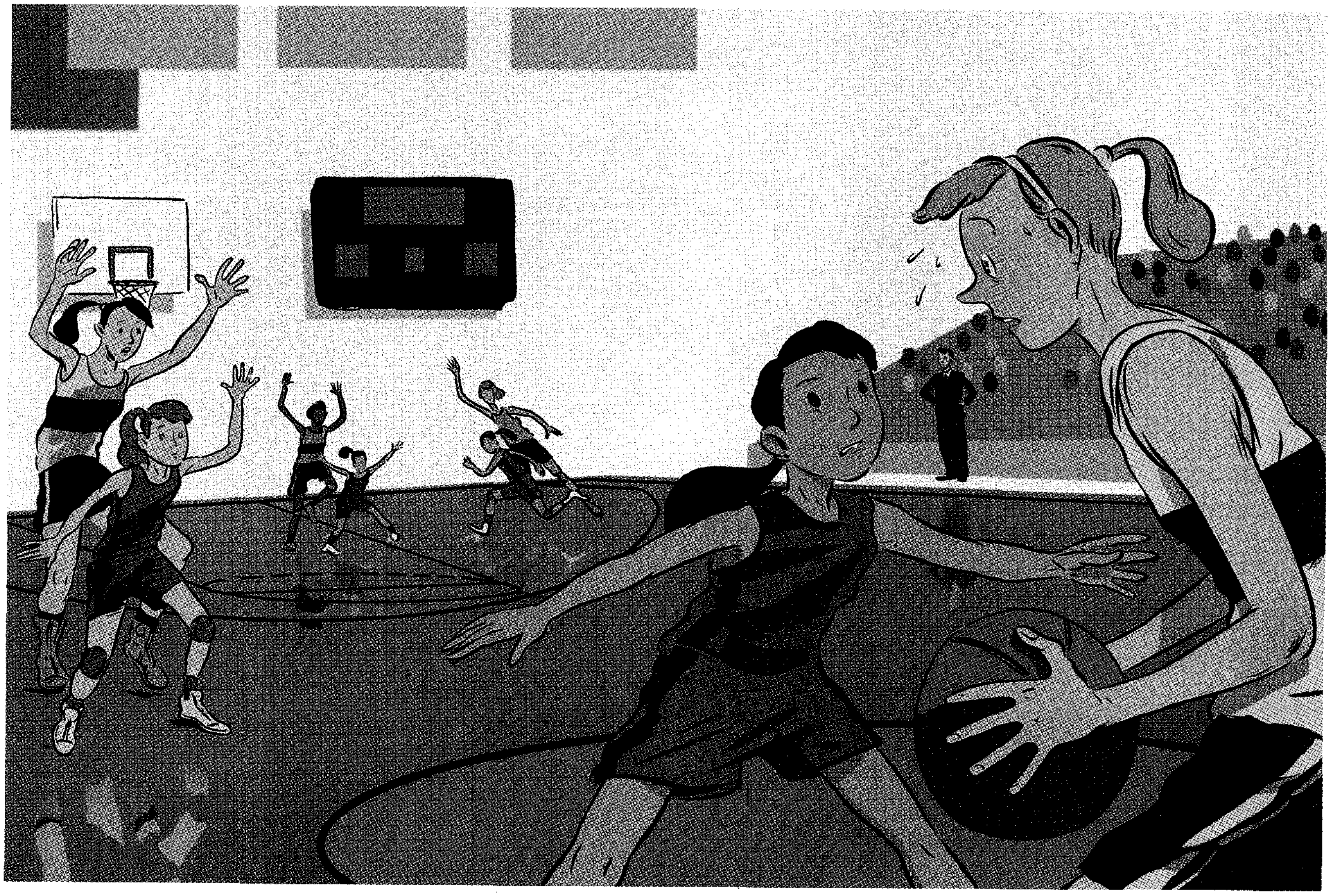
When underdogs break the rules.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

When Vivek Ranadivé decided to coach his daughter Anjali's basketball team, he settled on two principles. The first was that he would never raise his voice. This was National Junior Basketball—the Little League of basketball. The team was made up mostly of twelve-year-olds, and twelve-year-olds, he knew from experience, did not respond well to shouting. He would conduct business on the basketball court, he decided, the same way he conducted business at his software firm. He would speak calmly and softly, and convince the girls of the wisdom of his approach with appeals to reason and common sense.

The second principle was more important. Ranadivé was puzzled by the way Americans played basketball. He is from Mumbai. He grew up with cricket and soccer. He would never forget the first time he saw a basketball game. He thought it was mindless. Team A would score and then immediately retreat to its own end of the court. Team B would inbound the ball and dribble it into Team A's end, where Team A was patiently waiting. Then the process would reverse itself. A basketball court was ninety-four feet long. But most of the time a team defended only about twenty-four feet of that, conceding the other seventy feet. Occasionally, teams would play a full-court press—that is, they would contest their opponent's attempt to advance the ball up the court. But they would do it for only a few minutes at a time. It was as if there were a kind of conspiracy in the basketball world about the way the game ought to be played, and Ranadivé thought that that conspiracy had the effect of widening the gap between good teams and weak teams. Good teams, after all, had players who were tall and could dribble and shoot well; they could crisply execute their carefully prepared plays in their opponent's end. Why, then, did weak teams play in a way that made it easy for good teams to do the very things that made them so good?

Ranadivé looked at his girls. Morgan and Julia were serious basketball players. But Nicky, Angela, Dani, Holly, Annika, and his own daughter, Anjali, had never played the game before. They weren't all that tall. They couldn't shoot. They weren't particularly adept at dribbling. They were not the sort who played pickup games at the playground every evening. Most of them were, as Ranadivé says, "little blond girls" from Menlo Park and Redwood City, the heart of Silicon Valley. These were the daughters of computer programmers and people with graduate degrees. They worked on science projects, and read books, and went



ZOHAR LAZAR

A non-stop full-court press gives weak basketball teams a chance against far stronger teams. Why have so few adopted it?

on ski vacations with their parents, and dreamed about growing up to be marine biologists. Ranadivé knew that if they played the conventional way—if they let their opponents dribble the ball up the court without opposition—they would almost certainly lose to the girls for whom basketball was a passion. Ranadivé came to America as a seventeen-year-old, with fifty dollars in his pocket. He was not one to accept losing easily. His second principle, then, was that his team would play a real full-court press, every game, all the time. The team ended up at the national championships. "It was really random," Anjali Ranadivé said. "I mean, my father had never played basketball before."

David's victory over Goliath, in the Biblical account, is held to be an anomaly. It was not. Davids win all the time. The political scientist Ivan Arreguín-Toft recently looked at every war fought in the past two hundred years between strong and weak combatants. The Goliaths, he found, won in 71.5 per cent of the cases. That is a remarkable fact. Arreguín-Toft was analyzing conflicts in which one side was at least ten times as powerful—in terms of armed might and population—as its opponent, and even in those lopsided contests the underdog won almost a third of the time.

In the Biblical story of David and Goliath, David initially put on a coat of mail and a brass helmet and girded himself with a sword: he prepared to wage a conventional battle of swords against Goliath. But then he stopped. "I cannot walk in these, for I am unused to it," he said (in Robert Alter's translation), and picked up those five smooth stones. What happened, Arreguín-Toft wondered, when the underdogs likewise acknowledged their weakness and chose an unconventional strategy? He went back and re-analyzed his data. In those cases, David's winning percentage went from 28.5 to 63.6. When underdogs choose not to play by Goliath's rules, they win, Arreguín-Toft concluded, "*even when everything we think we know about power says they shouldn't.*"

Consider the way T. E. Lawrence (or, as he is better known, Lawrence of Arabia) led the revolt against the Ottoman Army occupying Arabia near the end of the First World War. The British were helping the Arabs in their uprising, and the initial focus was Medina, the city at the end of a long railroad that the Turks had built, running south from Damascus and down through the Hejaz desert. The Turks had amassed a large force in Medina, and the British leadership wanted Lawrence to gather the Arabs and destroy the Turkish garrison there, before the Turks could threaten the entire region.

But when Lawrence looked at his ragtag band of Bedouin fighters he realized that a direct attack on Medina would never succeed. And why did taking the city matter, anyway? The Turks sat in Medina "on the defensive, immobile." There were so many of them, consuming so much food and fuel and water, that they could hardly make a major move across the desert. Instead of attacking the Turks at their point of strength, Lawrence reasoned, he ought to attack them where they were weak—along the vast, largely unguarded length of railway line that was their connection to Damascus. Instead of focussing his attention on Medina, he should wage war over the broadest territory possible.

The Bedouins under Lawrence's command were not, in conventional terms, skilled troops. They were nomads. Sir Reginald Wingate, one of the British commanders in the region, called them "an untrained rabble, most of whom have never fired a rifle." But they were tough and they were mobile. The typical Bedouin soldier carried no more than a rifle, a hundred rounds of ammunition, forty-five pounds of flour, and a pint of drinking water, which meant that he could travel as much as a hundred and ten miles a day across the desert, even in summer. "Our cards were speed and time, not hitting power," Lawrence wrote. "Our largest available resources were the tribesmen, men quite unused to formal warfare, whose assets were movement, endurance, individual intelligence, knowledge of the country, courage." The eighteenth-century general Maurice de Saxe famously said that the art of war was about legs, not arms, and Lawrence's troops were *all* legs. In one typical stretch, in the spring of 1917, his men dynamited sixty rails and cut a telegraph line at Buair on March 24th, sabotaged a train and twenty-five rails at Abu al-Naam on March 25th, dynamited fifteen rails and

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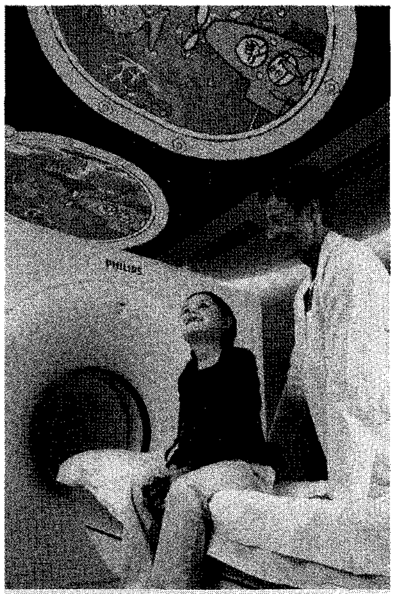

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cut a telegraph line at Istabl Antar on March 27th, raided a Turkish garrison and derailed a train on March 29th, returned to Buair and sabotaged the railway line again on March 31st, dynamited eleven rails at Hediah on April 3rd, raided the train line in the area of Wadi Dhaiji on April 4th and 5th, and attacked twice on April 6th.

Lawrence's masterstroke was an assault on the port town of Aqaba. The Turks expected an attack from British ships patrolling the waters of the Gulf of Aqaba to the west. Lawrence decided to attack from the east instead, coming at the city from the unprotected desert, and to do that he led his men on an audacious, six-hundred-mile loop—up from the Hejaz, north into the Syrian desert, and then back down toward Aqaba. This was in summer, through some of the most inhospitable land in the Middle East, and Lawrence tacked on a side trip to the outskirts of Damascus, in order to mislead the Turks about his intentions. "This year the valley seemed creeping with horned vipers and puff-adders, cobras and black snakes," Lawrence writes in "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom" of one stage in the journey:

> We could not lightly draw water after dark, for there were snakes swimming in the pools or clustering in knots around their brinks. Twice puff-adders came twisting into the alert ring of our debating coffee-circle. Three of our men died of bites; four recovered after great fear and pain, and a swelling of the poisoned limb. Howeitat treatment was to bind up the part with snake-skin plaster and read chapters of the Koran to the sufferer until he died.

When they finally arrived at Aqaba, Lawrence's band of several hundred warriors killed or captured twelve hundred Turks, and lost only two men. The Turks simply did not think that their opponent would be mad enough to come at them from the desert. This was Lawrence's great insight. David can beat Goliath by substituting effort for ability—and substituting effort for ability turns out to be a winning formula for underdogs in all walks of life, including little blond-haired girls on the basketball court.

Vivek Ranadivé is an elegant man, slender and fine-boned, with impeccable manners and a languorous walk. His father was a pilot who was jailed by Indira Gandhi, he says, because he wouldn't stop challenging the safety of India's planes. Ranadivé went to M.I.T., because he saw a documentary on the school and decided that it was perfect for him. This was in the nineteen-seventies, when going abroad for undergraduate study required the Indian government to authorize the release of foreign currency, and Ranadivé camped outside the office of the governor of the Reserve Bank of India until he got his way. The Ranadivés are relentless.

In 1985, Ranadivé founded a software company in Silicon Valley devoted to what in the computer world is known as "real time" processing. If a businessman waits until the end of the month to collect and count his receipts, he's "batch processing." There is a gap between the events in the company—sales—and his understanding of those events. Wall Street used to be the same way. The information on which a trader based his decisions was scattered across a number of databases. The trader would collect information from here and there, collate and analyze it, and then make a trade. What Ranadivé's company, TIBCO, did was to consolidate those databases into one stream, so that the trader could collect all the data he wanted instantaneously. Batch processing was replaced by real-time processing. Today, TIBCO's software powers most of the trading floors on Wall Street.

Ranadivé views this move from batch to real time as a sort of holy mission. The shift, to his mind, is one of kind, not just of degree. "We've been working with some airlines," he said. "You know, when you get on a plane and your bag doesn't, they actually know right away that it's not there. But no one tells you, and a big part of that is that they don't have all their information in one place. There are passenger systems that know where the passenger is. There are aircraft and maintenance systems that track where the plane is and what kind of shape it's in. Then, there are baggage systems and ticketing systems—and they're all separate. So you land, you wait at the baggage terminal, and it doesn't show up." Everything bad that happens in that scenario, Ranadivé maintains, happens because of the lag between the event (the luggage doesn't make it onto the plane) and the response (the airline tells you that your luggage didn't make the plane). The lag is why you're angry. The lag is why you had to wait, fruitlessly, at baggage claim. The lag is why you vow never to fly that airline again. Put all the databases together, and there's no lag. "What we can do is send you a text message the moment we know your bag didn't make it," Ranadivé said, "telling you we'll ship it to your house."

A few years ago, Ranadivé wrote a paper arguing that even the Federal Reserve ought to make its decisions in real time—not once every month or two. "Everything in the world is now real time," he said. "So when a certain type of shoe isn't selling at your corner shop, it's not six months before the guy in China finds out. It's almost instantaneous, thanks to my software. The world runs in real time, but government runs in batch. Every few months, it adjusts. Its mission is to keep the temperature comfortable in the economy, and, if you were to do things the government's way in your house, then every few months you'd turn the heater either on or off, overheating or underheating your house." Ranadivé argued that we ought to put the economic data that the Fed uses into a big stream, and write a computer program that sifts through those data, the moment they are collected, and make immediate, incremental adjustments to interest rates and the money supply. "It can all be automated," he said. "Look, we've had only one soft landing since the Second World War. Basically, we've got it wrong every single time."

You can imagine what someone like Alan Greenspan or Ben Bernanke might say about that idea. Such people are powerfully invested in the notion of the Fed as a Solomonic body: that pause of five or eight weeks between economic adjustments seems central to the process of deliberation. To Ranadivé, though, "deliberation" just prettifies the difficulties created by lag. The Fed has to deliberate because it's several weeks behind, the same way the airline has to bow and scrape and apologize because it waited forty-five minutes to tell you something that it could have told you the instant you stepped off the plane.

Is it any wonder that Ranadivé looked at the way basketball was played and found it mindless? A professional basketball game was forty-eight minutes long, divided up into alternating possessions of roughly twenty seconds: back and forth, back and forth. But a good half of each twenty-second increment was typically taken up with preliminaries and formalities. The point guard dribbled the ball up the court. He stood above the top of the key, about twenty-four feet from the opposing team's basket. He called out a play that the team had choreographed a hundred times in practice. It was only then that the defending team sprang into action, actively contesting each pass and shot. Actual basketball took up only half of that twenty-second interval, so that a game's real length was not forty-eight minutes but something closer to twenty-four minutes—and that twenty-four minutes of activity took place within a narrowly circumscribed area. It was as formal and as convention-bound as an eighteenth-century quadrille. The supporters of

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that dance said that the defensive players had to run back to their own end, in order to compose themselves for the arrival of the other team. But the reason they had to compose themselves, surely, was that by retreating they allowed the offense to execute a play that it had practiced to perfection. Basketball was batch!

Insurgents, though, operate in real time. Lawrence hit the Turks, in that stretch in the spring of 1917, nearly every day, because he knew that the more he accelerated the pace of combat the more the war became a battle of endurance—and endurance battles favor the insurgent. "And it happened as the Philistine arose and was drawing near David that David hastened and ran out from the lines toward the Philistine," the Bible says. "And he reached his hand into the pouch and took from there a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine in his forehead." The second sentence—the slingshot part—is what made David famous. But the first sentence matters just as much. David broke the rhythm of the encounter. He speeded it up. "The sudden astonishment when David sprints forward must have frozen Goliath, making him a better target," the poet and critic Robert Pinsky writes in "The Life of David." Pinsky calls David a "point guard ready to flick the basketball here or there." David *pressed*. That's what Davids do when they want to beat Goliaths.

Ranadivé's basketball team played in the National Junior Basketball seventh-and-eighth-grade division, representing Redwood City. The girls practiced at Paye's Place, a gym in nearby San Carlos. Because Ranadivé had never played basketball, he recruited a series of experts to help him. The first was Roger Craig, the former all-pro running back for the San Francisco 49ers, who is also TIBCO's director of business development. As a football player, Craig was legendary for the off-season hill workouts he put himself through. Most of his N.F.L. teammates are now hobbling around golf courses. He has run seven marathons. After Craig signed on, he recruited his daughter Rometra, who played Division I basketball at Duke and U.S.C. Rometra was the kind of person you assigned to guard your opponent's best player in order to shut her down. The girls loved Rometra. "She has always been like my big sister," Anjali Ranadivé said. "It was so awesome to have her along."

Redwood City's strategy was built around the two deadlines that all basketball teams must meet in order to advance the ball. The first is the inbounds pass. When one team scores, a player from the other team takes the ball out of bounds and has five seconds to pass it to a teammate on the court. If that deadline is missed, the ball goes to the other team. Usually, that's not an issue, because teams don't contest the inbounds pass. They run back to their own end. Redwood City did not. Each girl on the team closely shadowed her counterpart. When some teams play the press, the defender plays behind the offensive player she's guarding, to impede her once she catches the ball. The Redwood City girls, by contrast, played in front of their opponents, to prevent them from catching the inbounds pass in the first place. And they didn't guard the player throwing the ball in. Why bother? Ranadivé used that extra player as a floater, who could serve as a second defender against the other team's best player. "Think about football," Ranadivé said. "The quarterback can run with the ball. He has the whole field to throw to, and it's still damned difficult to complete a pass." Basketball was harder. A smaller court. A five-second deadline. A heavier, bigger ball. As often as not, the teams Redwood City was playing against simply couldn't make the inbounds pass within the five-second limit. Or the inbounding player, panicked by the thought that her five seconds were about to be up, would throw the ball away. Or her pass would be intercepted by one of the Redwood City players. Ranadivé's girls were maniacal.

The second deadline requires a team to advance the ball across mid-court, into its opponent's end, within ten seconds, and if Redwood City's opponents met the first deadline the girls would turn their attention to the second. They would descend on the girl who caught the inbounds pass and "trap" her. Anjali was the designated trapper. She'd sprint over and double-team the dribbler, stretching her long arms high and wide. Maybe she'd steal the ball. Maybe the other player would throw it away in a panic—or get bottled up and stalled, so that the ref would end up blowing the whistle. "When we first started out, no one knew how to play defense or anything," Anjali said. "So my dad said the whole game long, 'Your job is to guard someone and make sure they never get the ball on inbounds plays.' It's the best feeling in the world to steal the ball from someone. We would press and steal, and do that over and over again. It made people so nervous. There were teams that were a lot better than us, that had been playing a long time, and we would beat them."

The Redwood City players would jump ahead 4–0, 6–0, 8–0, 12–0. One time, they led 25–0. Because they typically got the ball underneath their opponent's basket, they rarely had to take low-percentage, long-range shots that required skill and practice. They shot layups. In one of the few games that Redwood City lost that year, only four of the team's players showed up. They pressed anyway. Why not? They lost by three points.

"What that defense did for us is that we could hide our weaknesses," Rometra Craig said. She helped out once Redwood City advanced to the regional championships. "We could hide the fact that we didn't have good outside shooters. We could hide the fact that we didn't have the tallest lineup, because as long as we played hard on defense we were getting steals and getting easy layups. I was honest with the girls. I told them, 'We're not the best basketball team out there.' But they understood their roles." A twelve-year-old girl would go to war for Rometra. "They were awesome," she said.

Lawrence attacked the Turks where they were weak—the railroad—and not where they were strong, Medina. Redwood City attacked the inbounds pass, the point in a game where a great team is as vulnerable as a weak one. Lawrence extended the battlefield over as large an area as possible. So did the girls of Redwood City. They defended all ninety-four feet. The full-court press is legs, not arms. It supplants ability with effort. It is basketball for those "quite unused to formal warfare, whose assets were movement, endurance, individual intelligence . . . courage."

"It's an *exhausting* strategy," Roger Craig said. He and Ranadivé were in a

TIBCO conference room, reminiscing about their dream season. Ranadivé was at the whiteboard, diagramming the intricacies of the Redwood City press. Craig was sitting at the table.

“My girls had to be more fit than the others,” Ranadivé said.

“He used to make them run,” Craig said, nodding approvingly.

“We followed soccer strategy in practice,” Ranadivé said. “I would make them run and run and run. I couldn’t teach them skills in that short period of time, and so all we did was make sure they were fit and had some basic understanding of the game. That’s why attitude plays such a big role in this, because you’re going to get tired.” He turned to Craig. “What was our cheer again?”

The two men thought for a moment, then shouted out happily, in unison, “One, two, three, ATTITUDE!”

That was it! The whole Redwood City philosophy was based on a willingness to try harder than anyone else.

“One time, some new girls joined the team,” Ranadivé said, “and so in the first practice I had I was telling them, ‘Look, this is what we’re going to do,’ and I showed them. I said, ‘It’s all about attitude.’ And there was this one new girl on the team, and I was worried that she wouldn’t get the whole attitude thing. Then we did the cheer and she said, ‘No, no, it’s not One, two three, ATTITUDE. It’s One, two, three, attitude HAH’ ”—at which point Ranadivé and Craig burst out laughing.

In January of 1971, the Fordham University Rams played a basketball game against the University of Massachusetts Redmen. The game was in Amherst, at the legendary arena known as the Cage, where the Redmen hadn’t lost since December of 1969. Their record was 11–1. The Redmen’s star was none other than Julius Erving—Dr. J. The UMass team was very, very good. Fordham, by contrast, was a team of scrappy kids from the Bronx and Brooklyn. Their center had torn up his knee the first week of the season, which meant that their tallest player was six feet five. Their starting forward—and forwards are typically almost as tall as centers—was Charlie Yelverton, who was six feet two. But from the opening buzzer the Rams launched a full-court press, and never let up. “We jumped out to a thirteen-to-six lead, and it was a war the rest of the way,” Digger Phelps, the Fordham coach at the time, recalls. “These were tough city kids. We played you ninety-four feet. We knew that sooner or later we were going to make you crack.” Phelps sent in one indefatigable Irish or Italian kid from the Bronx after another to guard Erving, and, one by one, the indefatigable Irish and Italian kids fouled out. None of them were as good as Erving. It didn’t matter. Fordham won, 87–79.

In the world of basketball, there is one story after another like this about legendary games where David used the full-court press to beat Goliath. Yet the puzzle of the press is that it has never become popular. People look at upsets like Ford-

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ham over UMass and call them flukes. Basketball sages point out that the press can be beaten by a well-coached team with adept ball handlers and astute passers—and that is true. Ranadivé readily admitted that all an opposing team had to do to beat Redwood City was press back: the girls were not good enough to handle their own medicine. Playing insurgent basketball did not guarantee victory. It was simply the best chance an underdog had of beating Goliath. If Fordham had played UMass the conventional way, it would have lost by thirty points. And yet somehow that lesson has escaped the basketball establishment.

What did Digger Phelps do, the season after his stunning upset of UMass? He never used the full-court press the same way again. The UMass coach, Jack Leaman, was humbled in his own gym by a bunch of street kids. Did he learn from his defeat and use the press himself the next time he had a team of underdogs? He did not.

The only person who seemed to have absorbed the lessons of that game was a skinny little guard on the UMass freshman team named Rick Pitino. He didn't play that day. He watched, and his eyes grew wide. Even now, thirty-eight years later, he can name, from memory, nearly every player on the Fordham team: Yelverton, Sullivan, Mainor, Charles, Zambetti. "They came in with the most unbelievable pressing team I'd ever seen," Pitino said. "Five guys between six feet five and six feet. It was unbelievable how they covered ground. I studied it. There is no way they should have beaten us. Nobody beat us at the Cage."

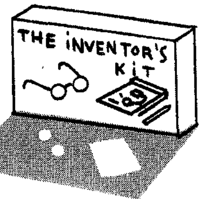
Pitino became the head coach at Boston University in 1978, when he was twenty-five years old, and used the press to take the school to its first N.C.A.A. tournament appearance in twenty-four years. At his next head-coaching stop, Providence College, Pitino took over a team that had gone 11–20 the year before. The players were short and almost entirely devoid of talent—a carbon copy of the Fordham Rams. They pressed, and ended up one game away from playing for the national championship. At the University of Kentucky, in the mid-nineteen-nineties, Pitino took his team to the Final Four three times—and won a national championship—with full-court pressure, and then rode the full-court press back to the Final Four in 2005, as the coach at the University of Louisville. This year, his Louisville team entered the N.C.A.A. tournament ranked No. 1 in the land. College coaches of Pitino's calibre typically have had numerous players who have gone on to be bona-fide all-stars at the professional level. In his many years of coaching, Pitino has had one, Antoine Walker. It doesn't matter. Every year, he racks up more and more victories.

"The greatest example of the press I've ever coached was my Kentucky team in '96, when we played L.S.U.," Pitino said. He was at the athletic building at the University of Louisville, in a small room filled with television screens, where he watches tapes of opponents' games. "Do we have that tape?" Pitino called out to an assistant. He pulled a chair up close to one of the monitors. The game began with Kentucky stealing the ball from L.S.U., deep in L.S.U.'s end. Immediately, the ball was passed to Antoine Walker, who cut to the basket for a layup. L.S.U. got the ball back. Kentucky stole it again. Another easy basket by Walker. "Walker had almost thirty points at halftime," Pitino said. "He dunked it almost every time. When we steal, he just runs to the basket." The Kentucky players were lightning quick and long-armed, and swarmed around the L.S.U. players, arms flailing. It was mayhem. Five minutes in, it was clear that L.S.U. was panicking.

Pitino trains his players to look for what he calls the "rush state" in their opponents—that moment when the player with the ball is shaken out of his tempo—and L.S.U. could not find a way to get out of the rush state. "See if you find one play that L.S.U. managed to run," Pitino said. You couldn't. The L.S.U. players struggled to get the ball inbounds, and, if they did that, they struggled to get the ball over mid-court, and on those occasions when they managed both those things they were too overwhelmed and exhausted to execute their offense the way they had been trained to. "We had eighty-six points at halftime," Pitino went on—eighty-six points being, of course, what college basketball teams typically score in an entire game. "And I think we'd forced twenty-three turnovers at halftime," twenty-three turnovers being what college basketball teams might force in two games. "I love watching this," Pitino said. He had a faraway look in his eyes. "Every day, you dream about getting a team like this again." So why are there no more than a handful of college teams who use the full-court press the way Pitino does?

Arreguín-Toft found the same puzzling pattern. When an underdog fought like David, he usually won. But most of the time underdogs *didn't* fight like David. Of the two hundred and two lopsided conflicts in Arreguín-Toft's database, the underdog chose to go toe to toe with Goliath the conventional way a hundred and fifty-two times—and lost a hundred and nineteen times. In 1809, the Peruvians fought the Spanish straight up and lost; in 1816, the Georgians fought the Russians straight up and lost; in 1817, the Pindaris fought the British straight up and lost; in the Kandyan rebellion of 1817, the Sri Lankans fought the British straight up and lost; in 1823, the Burmese chose to fight the British straight up and lost. The list of failures was endless. In the nineteen-forties, the Communist insurgency in Vietnam bedevilled the French until, in 1951, the Viet Minh strategist Vo Nguyen Giap switched to conventional warfare—and promptly suffered a series of defeats. George Washington did the same in the American Revolution, abandoning the guerrilla tactics that had served the colonists so well in the conflict's early stages. "As quickly as he could," William Polk writes in "Violent Politics," a history of unconventional warfare, Washington "devoted his energies to creating a British-type army, the Continental Line. As a result, he was defeated time after time and almost lost the war."

It makes no sense, unless you think back to that Kentucky-L.S.U. game and to Lawrence's long march across the desert to Aqaba. It is easier to dress soldiers in bright uniforms and have them march to the sound of a fife-and-drum corps than it is to have them ride six



hundred miles through the desert on the back of a camel. It is easier to retreat and compose yourself after every score than swarm about, arms flailing. We tell ourselves that skill is the precious resource and effort is the commodity. It's the other way around. Effort can trump ability—legs, in Saxe's formulation, can overpower arms—because relentless effort is in fact something rarer than the ability to engage in some finely tuned act of motor coördination.

"I have so many coaches come in every year to learn the press," Pitino said. Louisville was the Mecca for all those Davids trying to learn how to beat Goliaths. "Then they e-mail me. They tell me they can't do it. They don't know if they have the bench. They don't know if the players can last." Pitino shook his head. "We practice every day for two hours straight," he went on. "The players are moving almost ninety-eight per cent of the practice. We spend very little time talking. When we make our corrections"—that is, when Pitino and his coaches stop play to give instruction—"they are seven-second corrections, so that our heart rate never rests. We are always working." Seven seconds! The coaches who came to Louisville sat in the stands and watched that ceaseless activity and despaired. The prospect of playing by David's rules was too daunting. They would rather lose.

In 1981, a computer scientist from Stanford University named Doug Lenat entered the Traveller Trillion Credit Squadron tournament, in San Mateo, California. It was a war game. The contestants had been given several volumes of rules, well beforehand, and had been asked to design their own fleet of warships with a mythical budget of a trillion dollars. The fleets then squared off against one another in the course of a weekend. "Imagine this enormous auditorium area with tables, and at each table people are paired off," Lenat said. "The winners go on and advance. The losers get eliminated, and the field gets smaller and smaller, and the audience gets larger and larger."

Lenat had developed an artificial-intelligence program that he called Eurisko, and he decided to feed his program the rules of the tournament. Lenat did not give Eurisko any advice or steer the program in any particular strategic direction. He was not a war-gamer. He simply let Eurisko figure things out for itself. For about a month, for ten hours every night on a hundred computers at Xerox PARC, in Palo Alto, Eurisko ground away at the problem, until it came out with an answer. Most teams fielded some version of a traditional naval fleet—an array of ships of various sizes, each well defended against enemy attack. Eurisko thought differently. "The program came up with a strategy of spending the trillion on an astronomical number of small ships like P.T. boats, with powerful weapons but absolutely no defense and no mobility," Lenat said. "They just sat there. Basically, if they were hit once they would sink. And what happened is that the enemy would take its

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"I'm cutting articles out of the newspaper while we still can."

shots, and every one of those shots would sink our ships. But it didn't matter, because we had so many." Lenat won the tournament in a runaway.

The next year, Lenat entered once more, only this time the rules had changed. Fleets could no longer just sit there. Now one of the criteria of success in battle was fleet "agility." Eurisko went back to work. "What Eurisko did was say that if any of our ships got damaged it would sink itself—and that would raise fleet agility back up again," Lenat said. Eurisko won again.

Eurisko was an underdog. The other gamers were people steeped in military strategy and history. They were the sort who could tell you how Wellington had outfoxed Napoleon at Waterloo, or what exactly happened at Antietam. They had been raised on Dungeons and Dragons. They were insiders. Eurisko, on the other hand, knew nothing but the rule book. It had no common sense. As Lenat points out, a human being understands the meaning of the sentences "Johnny robbed a bank. He is now serving twenty years in prison," but Eurisko could not, because as a computer it was perfectly literal; it could not fill in the missing step—"Johnny was caught, tried, and convicted." Eurisko was an outsider. But it was precisely that outsiderness that led to Eurisko's victory: not knowing the conventions of the game turned out to be an advantage.

"Eurisko was exposing the fact that any finite set of rules is going to be a very incomplete approximation of reality," Lenat explained. "What the other entrants were doing was filling in the holes in the rules with real-world, realistic answers. But Eurisko didn't have that kind of preconception, partly because it didn't know enough about the world." So it found solutions that were, as Lenat freely admits, "socially horrifying": send a thousand defenseless and immobile ships into battle; sink your *own* ships the moment they get damaged.

This is the second half of the insurgent's creed. Insurgents work harder than Goliath. But their other advantage is that they will do what is "socially horrifying"—they will challenge the conventions about how battles are supposed to be fought. All the things that distinguish the ideal basketball player are acts of skill and coördination. When the game becomes about effort over ability, it becomes unrecognizable—a shocking mixture of broken plays and flailing limbs and usually competent players panicking and throwing the ball out of bounds. You have to be outside the establishment—a foreigner new to the game or a skinny kid from New York at the end of the bench—to have the audacity to play it that way. George Washington couldn't do it. His dream, before the war, was to be a British Army officer, finely turned out in a red coat and brass buttons. He found the guerrillas who had served the American Revolution so well to be "an exceeding dirty and nasty people." He couldn't fight the establishment, because he *was* the establishment.

T. E. Lawrence, by contrast, was the farthest thing from a proper British Army officer. He did not graduate with honors from Sandhurst. He was an archeologist by trade, a dreamy poet. He wore sandals and full Bedouin dress when he went to see his military superiors. He spoke Arabic like a native, and handled a camel as if he had been riding one all his life. And David, let's not forget, was a shepherd. He came at Goliath with a slingshot and staff because those were the tools of his trade. He didn't know that duels with Philistines were supposed to proceed formally, with the crossing of swords. "When the lion or the bear would come and carry off a sheep from the herd, I would go out after him and strike him down and rescue it from his clutches," David explained to Saul. He brought a shepherd's rules to the battlefield.

The price that the outsider pays for being so heedless of custom is, of course, the disapproval of the insider. Why did the Ivy League schools of the nineteen-twenties limit the admission of Jewish immigrants? Because they were the establishment and the Jews were the insurgents, scrambling and pressing and playing by immigrant rules that must have seemed to the Wasp élite of the time to be socially horrifying. "Their accomplishment is well over a hundred per cent of their ability on account of their tremendous energy and ambition," the dean of Columbia College said of the insurgents from Brooklyn, the Bronx, and the Lower East Side. He wasn't being complimentary. Goliath does not simply dwarf David. He brings the full force of social convention against him; he has contempt for David.

"In the beginning, everyone laughed at our fleet," Lenat said. "It was really embarrassing. People felt sorry for us. But somewhere around the third round they stopped laughing, and some time around the fourth round they started complaining to the judges. When we won again, some people got very angry, and the tournament directors basically said that it was not really in the spirit of the tournament to have these weird computer-designed fleets winning. They said that if we entered again they would stop having the tournament. I decided the best thing to do was to graciously bow out."

It isn't surprising that the tournament directors found Eurisko's strategies beyond the pale. It's *wrong* to sink your own ships, they believed. And they were right. But let's remember who made that rule: Goliath. And let's remember why Goliath made that rule: when the world has to play on Goliath's terms, Goliath wins.

The trouble for Redwood City started early in the regular season. The opposing coaches began to get angry. There was a sense that Redwood City wasn't playing fair—that it wasn't right to use the full-court press against twelve-year-old girls, who were just beginning to grasp the rudiments of the game. The point of basketball, the dissenting chorus said, was to learn basketball skills. Of course, you could as easily argue that in playing the press a twelve-year-old girl learned something much more valuable—that effort can trump ability and that conventions are made to be challenged. But the coaches on the other side of Redwood City's lopsided scores were disinclined to be so philosophical.

"There was one guy who wanted to have a fight with me in the parking lot," Ranadivé said. "He was this big guy. He obviously played football and basketball himself, and he saw that skinny, foreign guy beating him at his own game. He wanted to beat me up."

Roger Craig says that he was sometimes startled by what he saw. "The other coaches would be screaming at their girls, humiliating them, shouting at them. They would say to the refs—'That's a foul! That's a foul!' But we weren't fouling. We were just playing aggressive defense."

"My girls were all blond-haired white girls," Ranadivé said. "My daughter is the closest we have to a black girl, because she's half-Indian. One time, we were playing this all-black team from East San Jose. They had been playing for years. These were born-with-a-basketball girls. We were just crushing them. We were up something like twenty to zero. We wouldn't even let them inbound the ball, and the coach got so mad that he took a chair and threw it. He started screaming at his girls, and of course the more you scream at girls that age the more nervous they get." Ranadivé shook his head: never, ever raise your voice. "Finally, the ref physically threw him out of the building. I was afraid. I think he couldn't stand it because here were all these blond-haired girls who were clearly inferior players, and we were killing them."

At the nationals, the Redwood City girls won their first two games. In the third round, their opponents were from somewhere deep in Orange County. Redwood City had to play them on their own court, and the opponents supplied their own referee as well. The game was at eight o'clock in the morning. The Redwood City players left their hotel at six, to beat the traffic. It was downhill from there. The referee did not believe in "One, two, three, attitude HAH." He didn't think that playing to deny the inbounds pass was basketball. He began calling one foul after another.

"They were touch fouls," Craig said. Ticky-tacky stuff. The memory was painful.

"My girls didn't understand," Ranadivé said. "The ref called something like four times as many fouls on us as on the other team."

"People were booing," Craig said. "It was bad."

"A two-to-one ratio is understandable, but a ratio of four to one?" Ranadivé shook his head.

"One girl fouled out."

"We didn't get blown out. There was still a chance to win. But . . ."

Ranadivé called the press off. He had to. The Redwood City players retreated to their own end, and passively watched as their opponents advanced down the court. They did not run. They paused and deliberated between each possession. They played basketball the way basketball is supposed to be played, and they lost—but not before making Goliath wonder whether he was a giant, after all. ♦

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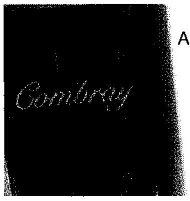

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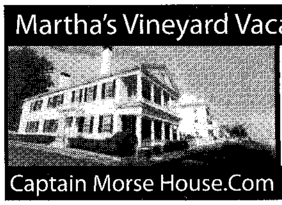
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THE FIFTH BLADE

On razors, songbirds, and starfish.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

What drives innovation is abundance and ease, not the pressure of scarcity.

BRUCE MCCALL

In the boom years, it seemed, everyone collected something. Cohiba cigars or Koons's inflatable flowers, vintage claret or worthless stock. In an economy of excess, money was free to flow into artifacts, cultural bullion. Bill Gates collected Leonardo codices, and Ronald Lauder collected old Eastern European synagogues. I collected razors.

It was an inadvertent collection, like Mrs. Madoff's collection of real estate, a collection cued absent-mindedly by abundance. But many men I've spoken to seem to have done the same thing, waking up after fifteen years and finding themselves to be Fricks or Morgans of the two- and three- and four- and five-blade shaver. It was a collection made in increments at the Duane Reades that sprang up on every block in those years, rather than at Sotheby's. Or else it got made at the inner, post-security pharmacies of airports, where one went to buy the razor one had forgotten, or been too frightened (were they banned or not?) to pack.

But it was the golden age of razors, as it was the golden age of bottled tea. We had two-blade razors and three-blade razors, razors with microfins and razors that buzzed and razors that beeped and razors that glowed in the dark. One could take advantage of the growth of the disposable razor, ten to a bag, hollow as a whistle; or one could invest instead in the multi-bladed, fifteen-dollar dreadnoughts of the shaving world. The Gillette Mach3 Turbo and the Gillette M3 Power; the Gillette Mach3 Turbo Champion and the Schick Quattro Chrome; the Gillette Sensor Excel and the Schick Xtreme3 and even (hidden away behind the moisturizer in the medicine cabinet) the Schick Xtreme3 SubZero. They were all there to be gotten, and I got them all.

Not long ago, I lined them up soberly in front of me, like Nixon saying farewell to his staff. All the era's collections are now being disassembled, and this one had to be, too. The razors looked oddly like the modern images of small dinosaurs seen in children's books, the newer, smarter kind of dinosaur—sleek Brancusi-like bodies, and a tightly wound pattern of scales and colors, streamlined trunks and strange hammer-headed faces. Some of them have their charm; I particularly like the Gillette M3 Power, which, as its devotees know, has a green-and-silver skin, with three blades on a swivel—and, touching detail, a triple-A battery inside, which makes it vibrate delicately to no particular purpose, like an old electric football game, or a woman of a certain age listening to Linda Ronstadt records.

Charming these razors might be; cool they were not. No status, no possible prestige, ever derived from the damn things, or radiates from them now. The only motive for buying the next was to buy the next; the only purpose in possession was to possess. Our generation bought them because, really, they were there, and we were drawn to their seeming ingenuity. Reading the *Wall Street Journal* recently, I found a new note of pathos to overhang the grouping. It seems that the Gillette Company, in an increasingly desperate attempt to support its newly minted five-blade razor, the Fusion, is creating ads that run down its previously minted three-blade razor. In an ad campaign that Veblen would have rejected as too improbable, Gillette, having sold the Mach3, must now unsell it: a Fusion ad (internally called "Nudging the Disciples") argues, "You see, five is better than three." In the spot, Tiger Woods, Derek Jeter, and Roger Federer literally knock Mach3 razors out of men's hands with a golf ball, a baseball, and a tennis ball.

What makes Gillette's panic so touching is that we should have seen it coming. We *did* see it coming: the three-blade razor may be the first known instance in the history of capitalism of a product mocked long in advance of its invention. "Saturday Night Live," on its very first program, thirty-odd years ago, not long after the two-blade razor appeared, actually did a parody commercial mocking the

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imagined advantages of the still imaginary three-blade razor: "Because you'll believe anything," the slogan went. And we did. We believed. Pity the capitalist, who, having made belief, must now unmake it, for fear of not being believed again.

Brooding on the old razors in the back of the medicine cabinet, I realized that Gillette, in its new ad campaign, was, in a deeper sense, giving away the game. For the truth is that the new razors, from the time of their invention, all worked about the same way, and each one about as well as all the others. The five-blade is no better or worse than the three; the three no better or worse than the two, buzzing or immobile. Ever since the Wilkinson Sword company started mass-producing stainless-steel blades, in 1961, every man with whiskers to cut has had no trouble cutting off his whiskers without cutting himself. The old ritual of nicks and cuts and styptic pencils, which our fathers knew, ended long ago.

Nevertheless, every possible variation was unleashed, pointing toward a strange but basic truth of life and marketing alike: that it is after a problem has already been solved that ever more varied and splendid solutions to it start to appear. I have come to think of this as the Devil's Theory of Innovation; cutthroat (or scrape-cheek) competition tends to produce mere stasis. Only complacency drives change. A baseline of comfort, not a sudden stress of desperation, is what lets innovation happen. When man or nature or Gillette has not yet found a good solution to a problem, we tend to stick closely to whatever looks even marginally plausible—the process that gives us centuries of the straight razor and styptic pencil, and now Mayor Bloomberg for three terms. Only a default level of adequacy assures an above-the-line profit of ingenuity.

Emerson's famous thought was that if you built a better mousetrap the world would beat a path to your door, but hidden in this was the belief that what made the mousetrap was an abundance of mice. You might suppose that where there are many mice—as in medieval societies, where it is man against rodent—there would be a corresponding variety of traps, and that the stress of necessity would force invention. Mice would immolate, and mice would hang; some would be dispatched by drowning and others trapped in vats of boiling oil. Medieval man would have found as many ways to kill medieval mouse as medieval man did to kill medieval man. In fact, the medieval mousetrap, when it appears at all, in painting and archives, is a singular, almost fantastical and overelaborate device, like the death machine employed by the villain in a Bond film. The only famous image of a mousetrap in medieval art is the one that Joseph is making in the Mérode Altarpiece, by the fifteenth-century Master of Flémalle—and there is a charged scholarly debate about whether it *is* a mousetrap, and what it symbolizes, and another body of scholarship explaining why, if it is, it almost certainly wouldn't work.

GALVESTON, 1961

You who in crazy-lensed
Clear water fled your shape,
By choppy shallows flensed
And shaken like a cape,

Who gently butted down
Through weeds, and were unmade,
Piecemeal stirring your brown
Legs into stirred shade,

And rose, and with pastel
Coronas of your skin
Stained swell on glassy swell,
Letting them bear you in:

Now you have come to shore,
One woman and no other,
Sleek Panope no more,
Nor the vague sea our mother.

Shake out your spattering hair
And sprawl beside me here,
Sharing what we can share
Now that we are so near—

Small talk and speechless love,
Mine being all but dumb
That knows so little of
What goddess you become

And still half-seem to be,
Though close and clear you lie,
Whom droplets of the sea
Emboss and magnify.

—*Richard Wilbur*

We make a better mousetrap only in the increasing *absence* of mice. The first mousetrap patent, for the snap trap, didn't appear until 1894, when the rodent was already in retreat, a victim of improved sewer systems and more stringent public-health measures. The abundance of mouse-murder devices—glue traps and have-a-heart traps; sonic scare-sirens and battery-powered electrocution units—is a peculiarity of our time. When mice are on the run, we have time to think of how to kill them better; when we are overrun by mice, we turn to cats, prayers, and hope.

What is true of mousetraps may at times be true even of medicine: only since the birth of scientific medicine has there been much a doctor could really do. But did doctors before that day try everything? Not a bit. What they did was narrowly stereotyped and routine. They bled. They purged. They applied leeches. The principle is true of politics. Though for millennia men were badly ruled by hereditary monarchs, no one said, "This business of expecting the chief among the warriors to be our absolute leader, and then expecting his kids to have the same skills that he did—that's not working out too well, is it?" Only after its abolition could we consider its reformation. Only then did we invent constitutional monarchies and relaxed Scandinavian ones, have kings on bikes and kings with divorced wives in rehab. Scarcity encourages people to hold the rites of scarcity sacred. What encourages novelty is the confidence that the new things—like the inventory of a "novelty" store—aren't really necessary. Frivolity is the real mother of invention.

I might have left the line of thought to trail off at that dead end where three-thirty-in-the-morning thoughts repose had I not found myself reading, in that insomniac bed, several of the newer theorists of natural selection and its discontents. The Devil's Theory of Innovation, I found, may be not just a fact of culture but a principle of nature, central to a whole new picture of biological evolution.

Evolution, we have always been told, is driven by stress, by the struggle for existence. The old Darwinian view was that competition for resources made animals evolve or go extinct; the more competitive the landscape, the harder the creatures had to work for a living, the more specialized jobs they found to do, and the more change you got. In dull periods of plenty, in unchanging oceans and unalterable plains, stasis ruled. Pain made change.

The new idea is almost the opposite. Terrence Deacon, for instance, a professor of biological anthropology and linguistics at Berkeley, has argued that animals' appearance alters and their behavior changes—birds brighten and their songs grow elaborate—not in conditions of scarcity, where bird fights bird for every seed, but in landscapes of plenitude. In environments where it takes a lot of effort to make a living, genes have to work hard and each can do only one job: molars crunch, claws kill, larynxes cry; the genome is as segmented and task-defined as the working day was on a Detroit assembly line way back when. But once "selection pressure" lifts—once it doesn't matter so much if every claw kills, if every molar crunches—then the animal can do its own thing and find its own pleasures. This pattern makes for what Deacon calls "relaxed selection," like relaxed-fit jeans. Once the pressure to survive is eased, the genome can chill, worry less that each chromosome is doing its bit, and devote itself to elaboration. Deacon's idea of relaxed selection, he says, "allows mutations to modify certain genes and inactivate others so they don't have such a specific function."

When an animal's genes become "dedifferentiated," to use the science journalist Christine Kenneally's word, unstressed enough to slouch in casual pleasure, rather than standing at anxious attention, the traits associated with those genes get "dedifferentiated," too. "There's going to be more flexibility," Deacon says. "Or, to put it the other way around, there's going to be less specificity." The bottleneck of selection widens, and traits that might have been ruled out before by the dim struggle for existence are allowed to flourish in the bright sunlight of abundance. The early bird races to the worm and, worn out, croaks the same few flat notes as his fathers; the songbird that wakes at ten and ambles to the worm of his choice in a land where worms are cheap has time and energy to get up on a branch and improvise a new song.

Relaxed evolution favors the Ronald Firbanks over the Cotton Mathers, the playful dandy over the sober saver. Relaxed selection explains creativity in language and literature: once we no longer have to pressure our bodies to chew and hunt, the big heads behind them, having nothing to do, start doing what they please. It isn't the struggle for existence but the serenity of entertainment that explains our lives. The brain starts thinking as the jaw relaxes. We human beings are all three-blade razors, Gillette Mach3 Turbos and Schick Xtreme3s, with needless cutting surfaces and useless batteries, buzzing away, wasting energy and looking sexy, forged in plenty and thriving in abundance.

Now, Darwin, I knew from long years of night reading, had seen something like this, too: what he called "sexual selection" is the natural overcharge of the economy of abundance. Darwin realized, while writing "On the Origin of Species," that adaptive fitness seemed to reign when it came to those features which were obviously helpful to an animal making a living in a hard world: long beaks to get at hidden insects; long necks to eat hidden leaves; long infancies to learn hidden cultural secrets. But what about those features—the peacock's tail, the elk's antlers, the fantastic colorings and intricate scales of tropical fish—which seemed merely ornamental? They were there not to help a creature make a living but to help him get a mate. The male peacock has time to grow his tail, and the female peacock time to look at it and say, Cute. The peacock's tail; the antlers of the Irish elk, which grew longer and longer until at last the animal was all antler; the song of the nightingale—all these superfluities evolved to make one animal, usually male, look sexier to potential mates. The male animals march up and down in what biologists call leks, natural runways, showing off their excesses.

Some of Darwin's modern admirers insist that something deeper is going on—that the peahen's preference for the peacock's tail is not aesthetic but prudent, fitness in disguise. She knows by instinct that a bird that can grow such a tail has fitness to waste, and is therefore going to be a better father, with more resources to spend on his kids. That wasn't Darwin's view. Darwin believed that animals chose better-looking animals to mate with because, well, they were better-looking—he thought that the process showed merely that animals had taste and an inborn sense of beauty.

Yet even Darwin's view, as it has been elaborated particularly by Richard Dawkins, may have been too narrow. The Stanford biologist Joan Roughgarden, in her new book, "The Genial Gene," argues that the entire notion of sexual selection as a form of self-seeking improvement on the part of each beast is a myth, a make-believe, and that the true state of nature is one of frivolous variation and bisexual flirtation. There's no evidence that peahens actually prefer the peacock with the most splendid tail, she tells us: the evidence is that peahens choose their mates more or less at random.

Perhaps, she suggests, the peacock struts his tail to impress other peacocks—to get entrée to a social clique. What the peacock's tail might really signal is not his strongly selfish genes but his serenely social nature. His alliances with other males might even reassure the female that he's hooked up—that there will be gay uncles and neighborhood handymen, benevolent cousins and helpful hoarders, all to support the kids. Our need to care for our young produces not competition but coöperation. The mystery of sex has been seen from the wrong direction. In truth, it takes a child to make a village.

What changes under the stress of adaptation is not the peacock but the peahen; predators, wolves and foxes, eat bright-colored peahens. Under that stress, peahens get ever drabber and plainer. It is the peahen's *plainness*, not the peacock's splendor, that demonstrates adaptive pressures. The peacock's tail is the default state, the natural state, of bounty. In Eden, the peahen would dress in Versace, too. For Roughgarden, superfluity is the sign of the natural world at its most natural, the path of descent when nothing interferes with it. Why invest in long tails and razors? The answer is: why not? We are, in this view, born to be inherently frivolous aesthetes, who like change for change's sake, oddity for oddity's, amusement for amusement's, art for art's. And, if there is a deeper reason for our liking, it is that such likings help make communities; we find our social selves by participating in the lek.

The values that nature reveals for Deacon, at Berkeley, and Roughgarden, at Stanford, sound very Northern California—creativity, community, shared parenting, and sexual toleration. Just as selfish selection is the kind of idea you would expect mid-Victorian patriarchs to dream up, social selection is the obvious child of the West Coast. Yet I would have remained content with this new line of thought—essentially cheerful in its promotion of the idea that we are born beautiful, made drab by pressures—had I not stopped to realize what, exactly, I was reading with. I was doing what I do every night, which is trying, and mostly failing, to read with a book light. The kind of book light I mean is the kind you buy so that you can continue reading books about evolution in the middle of the night while your spouse sleeps the restless sleep of those with children to raise and tuitions to pay. Such lights come in hundreds of varieties, sold everywhere from Barnes & Noble to Duane Reade.

I have tried them all, without much success. The business of shining a small bright light on a printed page in such a way that it does not also shine into the eyes of a nearby sleeping person is fiendishly difficult—so difficult that it produces a proliferation of failed solutions. I realized that I had made a second inadvertent collection, of these things, too. They look like the alien technology in "Independence Day," some mixture of long-necked flexibility and creepy extendability—they look like aliens themselves, for that matter, long and segmented and misshapen and repellent, with sharp, short heads that shine. Some hang around your neck, some sit on your stomach; some clip onto the edge of the book, where they shake and waver, and some bend around the book's binding to shine creepily on the pages. None of them quite do the trick. Some are too narrow, some too bright, most are too fragile, and all too short-lived; you have to change their little lithium batteries every few weeks, and you can never find the right kind to replace them with. Failure, it seems, generates variety, too, but it is the variety of futility, the small changes made in a lost cause, like G.M. fiddling with the metalwork on the grilles of its cars. The difference between the relaxed and the genial and the despairing and the fretful was smaller than I'd realized. It takes the eye of God to see, in the acts of man, which are the children of delight and which the dead ends of despair.

Then, the other night, shaking and grumbling, trying to find a working nightlight, I stumbled on a line from Dr. Johnson. No one who worries in the middle of the night, he says, should stay up worrying; the thing to do is light the light by your bed at once, and read. Visualizing the thing as the Doctor might have done it, I went into the dining room, snatched a candle from the closet, lighted it, and took it to bed.

It does all the work a reading light can: it casts a gentle, even glow on the page; it doesn't need to be adjusted on the binding as you turn the pages, and your spouse goes right on sleeping in its amber twilight. And when your reading is over, the chapter finished, there are no clicks, no sudden darkness, just a light blown out with a breath.

The solution had been there all along. The ideal technology was very old, and the proliferation of alternatives was not Darwinian but almost Freudian, a set of alibis and excuses designed to repress the old and primal truth. Whatever the West Coast evolutionists might tell us, abundance obscures the possibility of old elegant solutions even as it propagates new and varied ones.

Consider, as Rod Serling would say, the starfish. It makes a cameo appearance in the new evolution books. First emerging more than four hundred million years ago, starfish are as populous today as they have ever been. Though you often hear about the extinction of the frogs and the disappearance of the bees, nobody likes to point out the parallel starfish explosion that quietly takes place on coral reefs around the world.

They reproduce not by strutting leks and courtship, insertion and exhaustion, but by getting near enough to each other to spray a cloud of gametes and hope that they mingle and adhere, reproducing, as Brad and Angelina seem to, by mere proximity: the offspring just keep appearing. The creature's ideal reproductive strategy—mating with other starfish, releasing a million eggs, of which a handful survive the oceans, and then moving on—was arrived at ages ago: in the long indifferent view of nature, the starfish is more successful than all the antler-heavy elks and tail-proud peacocks and self-shaving mammals that we celebrate. The variations of abundance die at the moment of crisis, and the old stable dull solutions come to life again. The peacock years are over, and the starfish years begin. The grand lek is over and the big empty is here. The peacock with its tail and buzzing batteries is dying. The starfish, by candlelight, inherits the earth.

Hope, though, does have feathers, and, like the heedless songbird, still sings its song, struts its tail. My fourteen-year-old son shaved for the first time the other day. A faint mustache, the classic adolescent "Purple Rain"-era Prince-style smudge, had grown, and he wanted it gone. Like old man Frick, like the elder Morgan, I thought of passing on to him an item from the past, from the Collection: See, son, once the world was full of ornaments, abundance, the relaxed selection and mindless sociability of plenty. . . . But instead I bought him a bag of three disposable Bics, to get him through the years to come. He seems happy with the gift. Nature is the world we know. ♦

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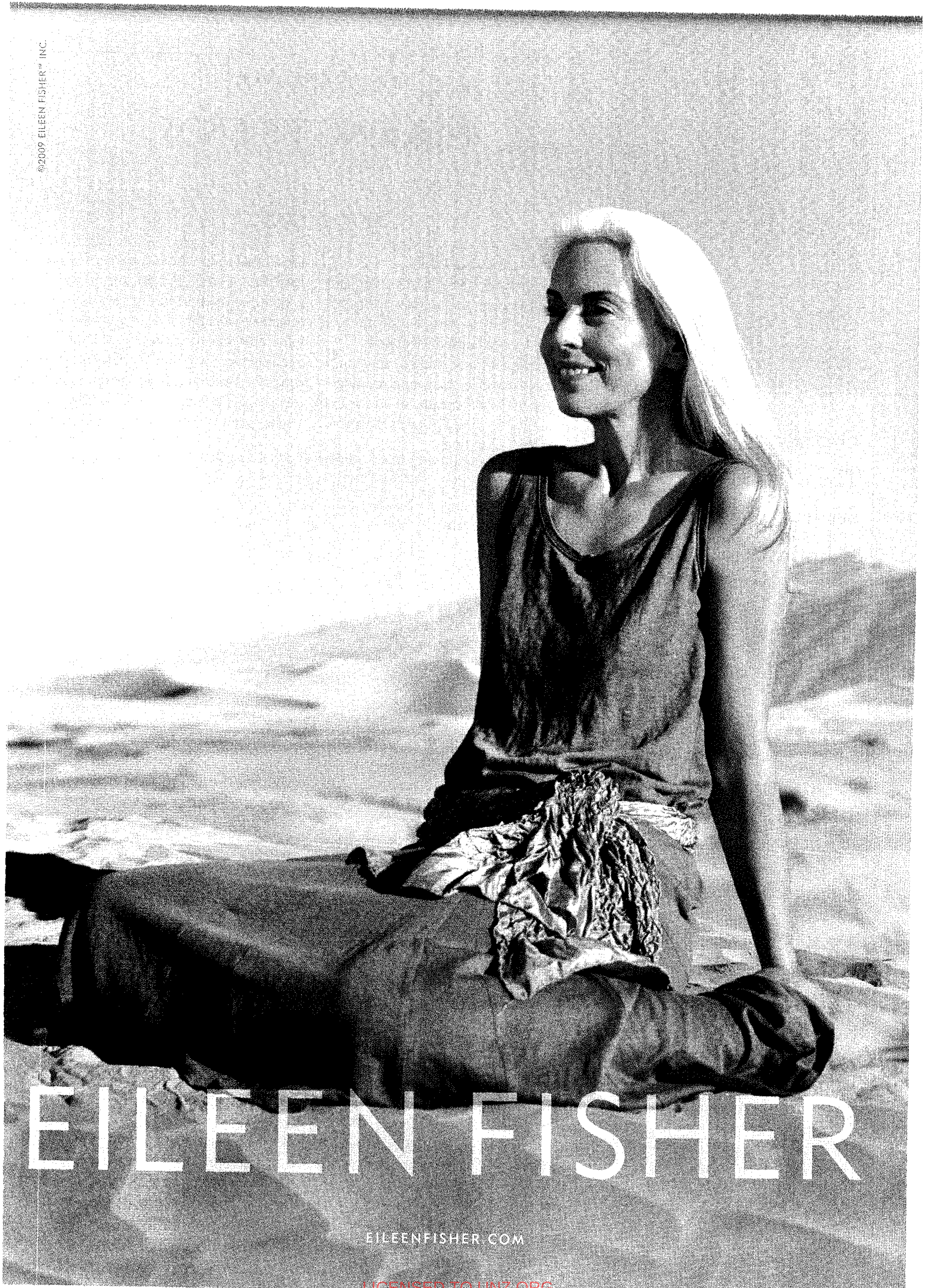
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MAKING FRIENDS

BY AMY OZOLS

Hello, six-year-old child.

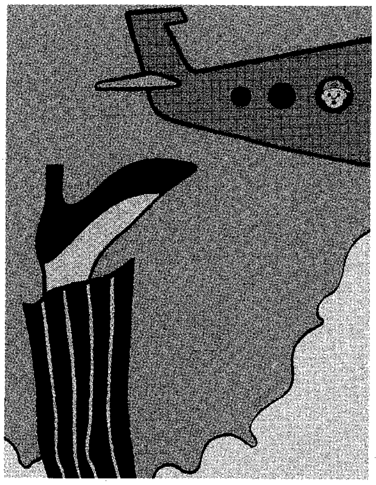
Seeing as how fate has brought us together here, in the crowded coach section of this expensive airplane, I thought I should introduce myself.

My name is Amy, and I'm an adult. I suspect that you're too young to understand what "adult" means, so let me explain. It means that I'm taller than you, and smarter, and that I get to do lots of awesome things, like smoke cigarettes and ovulate. It also means that I like to take naps on airplanes and read my newspaper in silence. These things seem to be very different from the things that you like to do.

I've gleaned from its near-constant utterance by the woman sitting next to you—your mother, I suppose, or perhaps a social worker or a federal prisoner who's being paid to spend time with you—that your name is Timmy. It's probably Timothy, actually, but people call you Timmy because it's cuter. Which is appropriate, Timmy, because you're very cute, you really are. You're really very fucking cute.

I'm going to drink this cup of coffee—would you like some? I didn't think so. You're more of a juice-box man, from what I gather. The way I gather this is by looking at the stain on my ninety-eight-dollar pants, the one you made when you put your juice box there. If I touched your pants, Timmy, I would probably be sent to jail. There are lots of differences between you and me, but that's one of the big ones: the quality and the seriousness of what happens when we touch other people's pants.

You're not much of a sleeper, are you, Timmy? We've just met, but it seems to me like maybe you don't really enjoy sleeping all that much. In fact, it seems to me that one of your greatest joys in life is wakefulness—and not simply passive wakefulness but the kind of vigorous wakefulness that makes a person like me start to question the very possibility of silence as a condition that can exist in the universe. I can see that I've confused you, Timmy, and I apologize; I was only trying to point out that you really seem to enjoy being awake. Let me make it up to you by giving you this modest dose of Ambien. It's a kind of candy for your soul. Your soul is a kind of mouth that's inside your brain.



MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

Here comes the nice stewardess lady with a bag for collecting people's garbage. Would you like me to give her some of the garbage that's strewn all over your seat—and, if we're being perfectly honest here, Timmy, all over my seat as well? And, while we're at it, maybe I could give her this talking doll—the one that sings songs, very loud songs, songs of terrifying and ungodly volume, from that animated movie about adventurous insects. It's not that I don't love the doll; it's just that I'm pretty sure it's illegal for children to carry such things on airplanes. Have you heard of terrorism, Timothy? That's why it's illegal for you to have this doll.

Your whimpering and your dripping facial parts suggest that perhaps this conversation has run its course, so I'll let you get back to your finger painting, your fidgeting, and your wanton, inexplicable shredding of the in-flight magazine. I'll be here in my seat, fantasizing about hurtling my childless adult body out of the airplane and into the sky. Enjoy the rest of the flight, Timmy. I've really enjoyed sitting next to you. It's fun to make new friends. ♦

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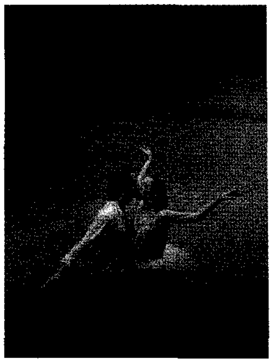

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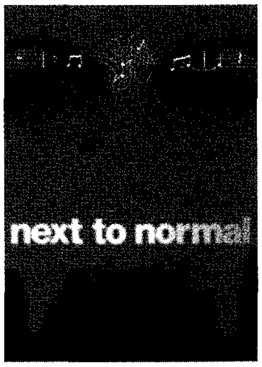

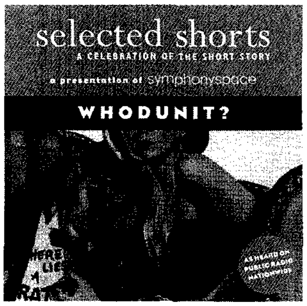
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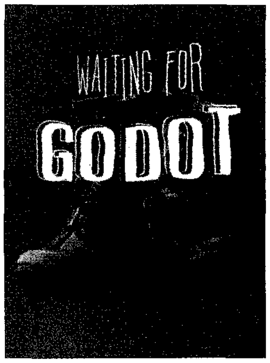

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE ART DOCTOR

How do you restore works made with latex, caviar, or elephant dung?

BY REBECCA MEAD

In late 2007, Ann Goldstein, the senior curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, asked Rosa de la Cruz, a collector of contemporary art who lives in Key Biscayne, Florida, if she would lend the museum a painting by Martin Kippenberger, for the German artist's first major North American retrospective. (The exhibition, which opened last September, travelled this spring to the Museum of Modern Art.) Kippenberger, who died in 1997, at the age of forty-four, was hard-living, prolific, and provocative: his varied œuvre includes a sculpture of a coffee table, the surface of which is made from a canvas painted by Gerhard Richter, and a crucified wooden frog holding a stein of beer in one appendage and an egg in another. The painting owned by Cruz, titled "M.K.N.Y.," was completed in 1990 and is a self-portrait of sorts: the canvas bears a silk-screened image of Kippenberger, who is standing outside a bank in downtown New York with a missile in his arms, as if he were about to stage an assault upon the institution using techniques derived from Looney Tunes. Overlying the canvas, partially obscuring the image, is a thick sheet of latex, molded into crude patterns that suggest an enthusiastic adventure in finger painting.

Cruz was happy to let MOCA borrow the painting, which usually hangs in her modernist waterfront home. But, before shipping off the work, she took a close look at it, and discovered, as she put it later, that "the latex was moving a little bit." Cruz called Christian Scheidemann, a conservator of contemporary art who runs a company called Contemporary Conservation, and he asked her to send "M.K.N.Y." to his studio, in New York.

The painting arrived in less than reassuring condition. The latex, which had the color and translucency of amber, had become brittle and vulnerable to cracking, and was perilously saggy, in the manner of nylon stockings after excessive wear. After discussing the work with conservatorial colleagues and a former assistant in Kippenberger's studio, Scheidemann and his team settled upon a course of treatment. Having suspended the painting face down, they stabilized the latex by spraying it with a coat of archival-quality acrylic solution, both on its surface and on the inner portions that had loosened from the silk-screened canvas. Kippenberger did not like to frame his paintings, but Scheidemann recommended that the work henceforth be placed in a matte white frame, to prevent further damage. "Like a hospital bed," he said.

The Contemporary Conservation studio is on West Twenty-second Street, overlooking the West Side Highway. Like the best modern hospitals, the space is light and clean, and is occupied by calm, highly qualified personnel. Scheidemann, a genial native of Bonn, who moved to New York six years ago, presides over five conservators and administrators, most of whom are European and all of whom are female. They are a generation younger than Scheidemann, who is a youthful fifty-six. In the studio, there are four tables upon which works can be laid while they are being treated; the tables are surrounded by standing lamps that are typically used in hospitals as a palliative for depression. Conservation tools are arrayed in glass-fronted cabinets like the wares on an apothecary's shelves: a bottle of sealing wax called Cyclododecan, whose label reads "Do not eat, drink, or smoke"; half a pint of Heinz white vinegar; a tiny jar of International Klein Blue—the original, and very rare, pigment used by the minimalist artist Yves Klein, which Scheidemann was given by a colleague as a fortieth-birthday present.

Members of the art world invariably resort to medical metaphor when speaking of Scheidemann, who is tall, has tousled salt-and-pepper hair, and develops a quizzical furrow in his brow when he's concentrating or is immersed in conversation. "He's like a surgeon," David Leiber, the gallerist, says. Over several months, I saw various works that had been committed to Scheidemann's care. A Takashi Murakami "Louis Vuitton" painting had been dropped on its corner; Scheidemann was planning to rebuild the damaged section from the back of the canvas. An exquisite abstract painting by Rudolf Stingel, the silvery surface of which had been besmirched by fingerprints of unknown origin, needed to be resprayed with the original paint, in minute patches. (Luckily for careless employees of galleries and shipping companies, not to mention overly inquisitive visitors to collectors' homes, Scheidemann's work does not extend to forensics.) A canvas by the Cuban Surrealist painter Wifredo Lam had arrived in the studio infested with hundreds of tobacco beetles; it was propped up against a wall, vacuum-sealed in a pouch filled with argon gas, which, it was hoped, was killing off the pests. On one of my visits, Scheidemann showed me a painting that had been the unfortunate landing place for a soccer ball; the canvas had a rounded indentation, like the surface of a pond into which a pebble has just been tossed. To get it back into shape, he said, would take two months of carefully monitored flattening with iron weights. Another time, I saw a Paul McCarthy sculpture: a life-size mannequin wearing nothing but a green sweater, with an enormous red tomato instead of a head. The sculpture had been therapeutically decapitated by Scheidemann's team, so that one of them could work on repairing a patch of red paint on the rear of the tomato.

Christian Scheidemann with a Paul McCarthy sculpture. Photograph by Phillip Toledano.

PAUL MCCARTHY, "TOMATO HEAD" (1994)

Though Scheidemann's iPhone will always ring after an accident—a Richard Phillips portrait of George W. Bush, dented by a fall; a minimalist painting accidentally sneezed upon at a museum—much of the work of his studio is preventive. He advises collectors on the correct temperature for a living room where works of art hang; he vacuums specks of dust off a sculpture being displayed in a gallery. This assumes, of course, that the dust is not an integral part of the work, as in Marcel Duchamp's "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)," which incorporates motes that accumulated in the artist's studio in 1920. (Scheidemann, who has a dry sense of humor, has discussed this work in a lecture, entitled "The Significance of Dirt, Dust, and Droppings in Contemporary Art," in which he attempts to rectify the fact that, as he put it, "dirt as an artistic medium of expression is still underrated.")

Another medical metaphor for Scheidemann's trade—one from which he understandably shies—is that of cosmetic surgery, with the conservator cast as the dermatologist who advises facial peels starting at thirty and Botox injections at thirty-five, the better to obviate a face-lift at forty-five. Because the remedial treatment of contemporary art works can have a significant impact upon their resale value, and upon their attractiveness to museum curators, Scheidemann's work is, of necessity, cloaked in discretion. This gives rise to his most preferred medical analogy. "I always say our work is like that of a urologist," he says. "You never talk about it, but everybody needs one."

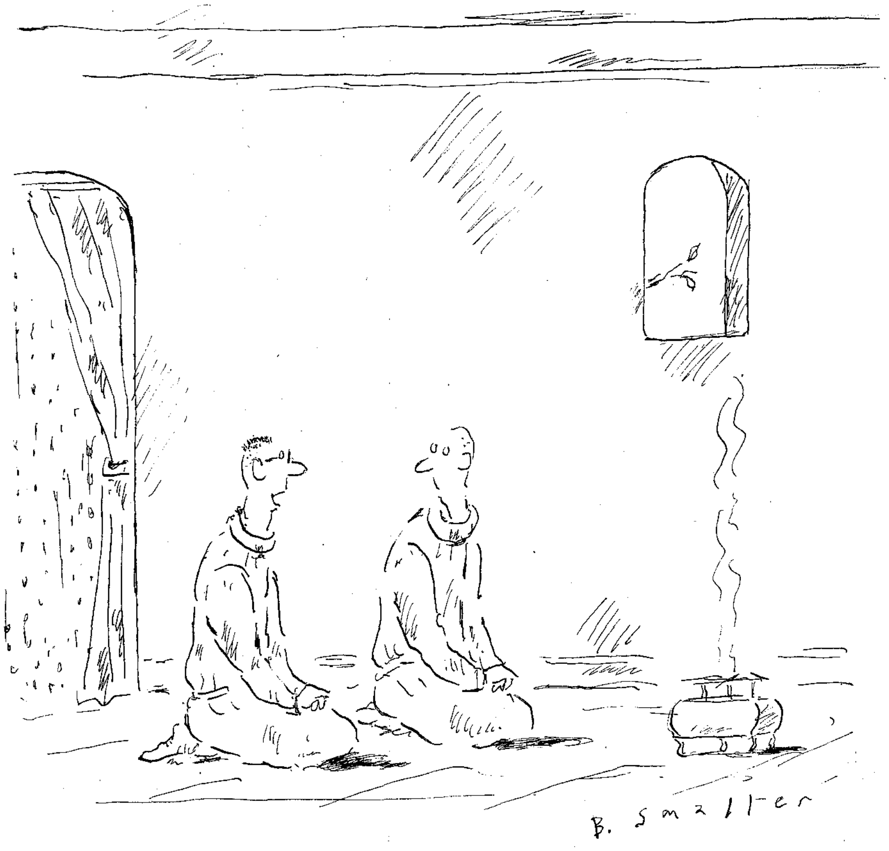
Scheidemann has a sympathetic bedside manner that exudes skill and soothes anxious collectors. "We never say, 'We can't do it,'" he told me one day. "Sometimes the solution lies simply in looking at the painting. I think understanding is part of the treatment." A few years ago, Ann Temkin, the chief curator of painting and sculpture at MOMA, drafted Scheidemann's help when the museum was installing "Bingo," a piece by Gordon Matta-Clark that consisted of carved-up sections of the façade of a condemned house in upstate New York. "One of the ironies of these pieces that are made from not very precious materials is that they are as fragile as, if not more fragile than, pieces that are made from precious materials," Temkin explained. "When the work was up, Christian had in his hand these leftover odds and ends—little pieces of house—that inevitably had fallen to the bottom of the crate. He just sort of walked along the piece, and scattered those little bits as the finishing touch of the installation. One of his great qualities is this acceptance of a work of art, and the state of a work of art that is right for itself, rather than some imposed standard of what 'good condition' ought to be."

Throughout most of the history of art, the job of conservation fell to other artists. In the sixteenth century, there emerged an industry of sculptors who restored the newly unearthed works of antiquity according to contemporary aesthetic principles, which often were at odds with the aesthetics of antiquity. In a celebrated example, Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli, the Renaissance sculptor, restored a Hellenistic sculpture of Laocoön and his sons. The central figure's right arm was missing, so Montorsoli created a new one, upraised in a gesture of defiance. The original limb—which was discovered in 1905, in a stone carver's studio in Rome, and was eventually reattached to the sculpture—was folded at the elbow with considerably less flourish than in Montorsoli's now iconic reimagining.

Techniques for the restoration of paintings began to be formally encoded only in the nineteenth century, when the great encyclopedic museums of Europe established specialized departments of conservation. In the early twentieth century, conservators began to collaborate with scientists, and by the nineteen-forties conservation and restoration regularly involved the use of radiology, ultraviolet light, and infrared photography. Some conservators used increasingly aggressive approaches to cleaning and conservation, favoring overpainting and other interventionist methods. In a controversial 1950 report, curators at the National Gallery in London characterized restoration as constituting an effort to present paintings "as nearly as possible in the state in which the artist intended them to be seen." One restorer who worked with Christie's in the sixties, Daniel Goldreyer, became so well known for his tendency to repaint damaged canvases that his name is still used as a verb, as in "That painting's been Goldreyered." Scheidemann represents a gentler approach. He told me, "What we are trying to do is keep the authenticity of the art work. How can you maintain the art work and accept the aging process? I think this is our challenge—to make these works look like a healthy forty years old."

Scheidemann is among just a handful of private conservators who specialize in contemporary art, and has become particularly admired for his skill in working with organic substances—fat, vegetable matter—and for his openness to the possibility that art can be made of anything. Ann Temkin told me, "Christian was an absolute pioneer in opening the conservation field's collective mind to work that generally had not yet been dealt with, and that involved materials that one would just not think of as valuable or precious, or worthy of great care and attention—dust particles, or toenail parings, or chocolate." She went on, "Christian's simple assumption was that if an artist considered it an integral part of the work, that piece of chocolate deserves as much serious attention as that bit of lapis lazuli in the painting, or that chunk of marble in the sculpture."

Such commitment is often not shared, or understood, by laypeople, or even by those who deal with art works for a living. Scheidemann remembers receiving a call from a collector who had bought a Rachel Harrison sculpture made of gray packing blankets wrapped around a central core. The collector's assistants, apparently thinking that the packing blankets were actually packing blankets, had dismembered the piece. With the help of Harrison, Scheidemann reconstructed the work, and sent it off to a company to



"When I was making money, I made the most money, and now that I'm spiritual I'm the most spiritual."

ship back to the owner. He subsequently received a phone call: someone had undone the sculpture a second time. Scheidemann and Harrison recomposed it once more, and this time, using thread and glue, fixed the blankets in place for good.

Scheidemann told me that he considers Harrison "the next Robert Rauschenberg," but his engagement with contemporary art is not uncritically enthusiastic. When I referred to the critic Jerry Saltz's judgment that eighty-five per cent of art that is produced is bad, Scheidemann said, "I think that's fair. Or too generous." He is especially pleased, then, when he can apply his skills to a piece that he considers important. A few years ago, he was summoned to Copenhagen to work on a painting by someone he admires, Chris Ofili, the British artist and Turner Prize winner, who is best known for incorporating elephant dung into his work. A piece of dung had fallen off a painting belonging to a Danish collector. "The collector said, 'This is a devaluation of my work, and I want a conservator to come and fix it,' " Scheidemann told me. Scheidemann obtained a new piece of dung from one of the three elephants at the London Zoo which regularly supplied Ofili's needs. (Ofili considered the animals his collaborators.) It fell to Scheidemann to trim a new piece of dung to exactly the right size, in order to fill the gap in the painting. "For five seconds, I thought, What am I doing here, carving shit?" he told me. "But I know this is for a higher reason, a better cause. It is important to do this."

On a recent Monday morning, Scheidemann and his team gathered to discuss the progress being made on various works under their care. The team, which included Scheidemann's two deputy conservators, Johanna Hoffmann and Claartje van Haaften, clustered around a rough-hewn triangular desk, topped with a large photograph of a garden, which was once part of an installation by the artist Jason Rhoades. The squawking of a pair of parakeets in a birdcage echoed from the next room. One of the birds is formerly part of an art work—an installation, by the Swiss artist Urs Fischer, of a house made from sourdough rolls and occupied by nine parakeets. When an Italian collector bought the piece, which was on display at a West Village gallery, the original birds could not be exported, and so two ended up at Contemporary Conservation. After one died, Scheidemann bought a new partner for the remaining bird, in a color that precisely matched that of the deceased.

"This is when we talk about things we don't know what to do with," Scheidemann told me. "The owners call and say, 'Are you working on this?' and we say, 'We are always looking at it.' We are not hiding anything. But sometimes you need to get in the right frame of mind." The team looked down the list of works that needed attention, the volume of which is always threatening to exceed their capacities. (The downturn in the contemporary-art market has not yet affected the studio, nor does Scheidemann expect it to do so. "We're not selling luxury items—we're providing a service," he says. "I don't think fewer art works will get damaged.") A painting by Laura Owens, a Los Angeles artist, had been under consideration for months. It had once hung in the bedroom of a collector's daughter, and had been hurt during a pillow fight; further damage had been done after the daughter had undertaken her own, amateur restoration.

The meeting was interrupted by the ringing of the doorbell, notifying Scheidemann of the arrival of an expert consultant whom he had called in for a more pressing case. This was "Sister Perpetua's Lie," an installation by Ree Morton, the late conceptual artist, which was scheduled to be shown within a couple of months, at a gallery in Vienna. The work, which included several tree stumps, had been in storage since 1995. When it was uncrated, it was discovered that one of the stumps had started to rot. Scheidemann had been charged with finding and preparing a replacement.

"Ideally, it should be from the same tree," Scheidemann explained. "But, if not, it should be from the same family." A member of the team had identified the kind of tree that the stump came from: a white oak. Then Leslie Teich, the project manager, had tracked down a farm in Garrison, New York, where she could buy a stump of the right size. After Teich brought the stump back to the studio, it was treated to simulate the appearance of aging. "We painted it and stained it—and then we realized that it is contaminated with bugs," Scheidemann said, looking at the stump, which lay on one of his operating tables. Several tiny holes, and the residue of the wood that had been excavated from them, were visible. "We have to get it fumigated," he said. "Otherwise, it will travel to Vienna and they won't let it in."

The expert consultant was Jimmy Tallman, from a company called Magic Exterminating, the name of which was embroidered upon the breast pocket of his blue work shirt. Tallman frowned as he looked at the stump. "It's not drywood termites," he said, thoughtfully. "It's some kind of bore beetle."

He made a call on his cell phone to his boss. "Hey, Lou, how are you?" he said. "I am with some customers in an art gallery with some white oak that is going to be part of a display. There are pebbles. It could be bore, right?" Lou apparently agreed that the piece needed to come into the shop for fumigation, which would take place in a heated chamber the size of Scheidemann's studio.

The remaining question was whether the stump needed to be shipped to the shop, which would take up precious time, or whether Tallman could transport it himself, in his van. "What's the value?" Tallman asked, with a note of uncertainty in his voice.

"Ten dollars," Scheidemann said.

Tallman looked relieved. "That's good," he said. "Because I had one lady, a customer, and I took her antique table out with me, and it turned out to be worth twenty thousand dollars."

"This will eventually be part of an invaluable installation," Scheidemann said. "But I think we gave ten dollars for the cutting. So right now it's worth ten dollars."

Scheidemann studied art history and conservation at the university in Bonn. "But I was never satisfied by looking at slides," he told me. He preferred dealing with the material object, and speculating about the artist's intentions: "We had to touch the art works, and look at the back of paintings, and could actually discover graffiti from 1448, and see the fingerprints of the artists, and see the first tests on the back side, and how it was done, and what the challenges were for the artist, and what they had in mind." Scheidemann collects historical canvases for reference in dating works of art; among them is a blank canvas made in 1840 that he refers to as "my Delacroix, which he had no time to paint. From the back, it looks totally like a Delacroix."

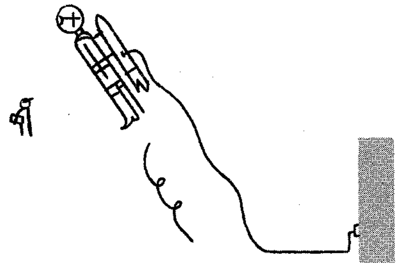
His first assignment as a trainee conservator was to chip cumulative layers of paint off a sculpture of the Virgin Mary, from 1520. "Once her coat was painted blue, because she was the royal mother," he recalled. "And then it was painted white, because she was the innocent Virgin, and then it was gilded. And what I found interesting was how the color changed the significance of the work."

Scheidemann trained for eight years, then became a conservator at the Hamburg Kunsthalle. Eventually, he left the museum world, frustrated that his recommendations weren't always followed by curators with less technical experience. He started a gallery in Hamburg with a couple of friends, although he did not especially flourish in the role of salesman. "I'm very Protestant," he told me. "I'm not Catholic enough to convince people that they should own art." But he thrived in the company of artists, who were grateful for his sensitivity to their concerns.

One such artist was Kiki Smith, the sculptor, who first met him after he was drafted to repair one of her works: a life-size statue of the Virgin Mary made from wax, wood, and cloth. (The Madonna had lost an arm in transit from New York to Germany.) "Where I had given it flesh, he gave it a bony structure," Smith said. Around this time, Scheidemann also got to know Matthew Barney, after being called in to work on an installation of Barney's that was part of the 1992 Documenta show, in Kassel, Germany. The work, called "OTTOshaft," included two three-foot-long poundcakes. It was displayed in a parking garage, and rats had got into the cake. "They ate it from the inside out—there was this hollow shell of crust left," Barney told me. "Nearby, there was this Mario Merz piece that had a lot of twigs and branches, and I think there were rats in the twigs." After considerable experimentation, Scheidemann figured out how to bake a new cake and then preserve it using a process called plastination, which removes the fats from a foodstuff and replaces them with resin.

Scheidemann says that he has learned a great deal from Barney, who has become a good friend. Not least of this knowledge is the metaphorical weight that might be carried by a giant poundcake, which in Barney's work refers to the metabolism of the body engaged in strenuous activity. "I thought it was all about a birthday cake," Scheidemann told me. "I didn't know it was about football. From just looking, you can't find out." Scheidemann has endeared himself to artists like Barney, in part, by being unafraid to ask the kind of naïve questions that many puzzled museum-goers dare not raise, for fear of seeming foolish. For favored clients, Scheidemann will sometimes engage in scientific research even before an art work is made. He has never charged for any such experiments, partly because he enjoys the challenge, and partly because he knows that if he makes the artists happy they will recommend him to collectors of their work. (Scheidemann's restoration fees range from several hundred to tens of thousands of dollars.)

In 1997, when Matthew Barney wanted to put pigeons in "The Ehrich Weiss Suite," an installation that included a coffin, Scheidemann studied the effects of pigeon droppings upon acrylic. If the droppings were not neutralized, they would corrode the coffin, Scheidemann determined, but Barney decided that this was an effect he wanted. For Zoe Leonard's work "Strange Fruit (For David)," which consists of more than three hundred fruit skins that have been stitched, zippered, or buttoned back together, he investigated the possibility of preservation by shock freezing. Ultimately, Leonard decided that the decay of the fruit skins was an integral part of her art work, which refers to the death, from AIDS, of the artist David Wojnarowicz, and is in the tradition of Dutch *vanitas* painting. As a result of his research, however, Scheidemann has in a vitrine in his studio a banana that is twelve years old and should last for at least another decade. It still looks fresher than those found in most bodegas.



The notion that a work of contemporary art might be built to decay makes many collectors and institutions understandably skittish. (In 1998, "Strange Fruit" was acquired by the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Ann Temkin, then the museum's curator of twentieth-century art, said dryly, "It was an unusual work to present to a board.") But even when contemporary works are not designed specifically to degenerate, they often make use of nontraditional materials, meaning that they are vulnerable to falling apart anyway.

In the mid-twentieth century, artists routinely began working with nontraditional materials: Joseph Beuys made works with fat or felt; Nam June Paik built sculptures out of television sets. Often, the purpose was to reject the traditional materials of the arts—bronze, marble, oil paints—and the bourgeois cultural value that they had accrued. Now that many of these artists have gained considerable bourgeois value themselves, it falls to conservators like Scheidemann to make fat and felt last as long as bronze or marble—or at least for twenty years, when the next generation of conservators can apply their own new techniques.

The prevailing code of ethics insists that anything that is done to a work of art should be imperceptible and reversible. Moreover, the desire of an artist or a collector to keep a work looking pristine should not influence the conservator's judgment about how to maintain the integrity of the work as it ages. "People always ask, 'Who do you feel responsible to?' " Scheidemann told me. "If a collector comes in and says, 'I want to have a piece fixed this way,' do you do it as the collector wants it, or as the artist wants it? I always say we are responsible to the art work, not to the artist or to the collector."

Even so, in Scheidemann's studio the artist and the collector are in on the discussion. One day, the sculptor Robert

Conspicuous Nonconsumption

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Gober, who works in silicone, plaster, fabric, and human hair, among other substances, stopped by Contemporary Conservation. Gober and Scheidemann first met in 1989, after a collector asked Scheidemann to restore one of Gober's "sink" sculptures—replicas of sinks, made from wood, metal, and plaster, and painted to look like ceramic. (The National Gallery of Art, in Washington, has one of the works in its collection.) Gober said of Scheidemann, "He called me out of the blue from Germany, and said he was coming to New York, and that he wanted to talk to me." At the time, Gober was beginning to work on a new sculpture called "Bag of Donuts," which consisted of a crumpled white takeout deli bag, made from hand-cut archival paper, with a dozen doughnuts nestled inside. "I had made the doughnuts, and I knew they would have to be preserved in some way, but I couldn't get any conservator in New York interested," Gober said. "It is very hard to find conservators who are comfortable going out of their comfort zone."

Scheidemann embraced the challenge, and had Gober send to his studio in Hamburg a hundred and thirty-nine doughnuts. After seeking advice from a conservator of ceramics at a local museum, Scheidemann determined that the best way to remove the grease from the doughnuts—and thereby prevent them from staining the archival paper—was to treat them in a low-pressure tank with acetone, the solvent that can be found in nail-polish remover. (Photographs of Scheidemann's studio at the time reveal a scene that's halfway between high-school chemistry class and "Top Chef.") The treatment took four days, during which the solvent was changed daily and the doughnuts were tested for any remaining grease by being placed on blotting paper.

The doughnuts lost weight in the process—according to the conservation report that Scheidemann produced for Gober, they went from thirty grams each to twenty-six grams—raising doubts about their structural integrity. The doughnuts therefore went back in the tank, to be refilled with paraloid B72, an acrylic resin. The final step in the treatment called for the doughnuts to be powdered with natural cinnamon, for enhanced verisimilitude. Gober ended up making eight versions of the sculpture; in 2006, one "Bag of Donuts" sold at auction for two hundred and forty thousand dollars.

Gober had come to Contemporary Conservation to look at a sculpture called "The Silly Sink," from 1985, which had started to show some cracks from the stress of hanging on a collector's wall. The work had been sitting for weeks on packing blankets in Scheidemann's studio. Gober had brought with him an assistant and a welder, who had constructed a pair of aluminum T-bars that would offer additional support to the work when it was remounted on a wall.

The men studied the way the sink was to balance on the bars. "It will not be invisible," Scheidemann said, regretfully.

"It will only be visible if you're lying on the floor," Gober replied, as he crouched beside his work. "And I always think that if you get on your knees or lie down on the floor you deserve some insight or reward."

No one knew exactly what type of wall the piece was to be remounted upon, and there was discussion of alternative ways in which the weight of the sink might be redistributed. Someone suggested affixing a metal panel onto the back of the sculpture. Scheidemann frowned at the thought of such an aggressive intervention, and put a finger to his lips. "Perhaps we should call the collector?" he said, and dialled the number, walking toward the tweeting parakeets by the window, for a moment of privacy. When he returned, he said, "I guess they don't know if they want it to go here or on the West Coast," he said. "So is there any way that we can make an armature that stays with the piece?"

Finally, it was decided that they

would try attaching a trapezoidal piece of metal to the back of the sink, which meant that the work would no longer lie flush against the wall but, rather, float a few millimetres away. Scheidemann and Gober agreed that this was a price worth paying for improved stability; and they also agreed that, since the metal plate would obscure the artist's signature, Gober would re-sign the work if the collector wanted him to do so. Only once the armature was completed would Scheidemann even begin to address the treatment of the cracks in the sink, which had brought it into the studio in the first place.

As the members of Gober's team prepared to leave, his assistant said of Scheidemann, "I call Christian the Wolf. You know in 'Pulp Fiction,' when they killed the guy, and had to call the Wolf to come and clean up everything? Not that you're cleaning up bloody messes in suburban homes, Christian."

"But I do," Scheidemann said.

In December, Scheidemann attended Art Basel Miami Beach, the annual contemporary-art fair. Fairs are peak times of business for Contemporary Conservation, what with all the shipping and handling, though he was there to socialize rather than to perform emergency surgery. In Miami, he got in touch with Maria Srebnick, who, with her husband, George Feldenkreis—the chairman of Perry Ellis—owns the beetle-infested Wifredo Lam painting that was still recovering in the studios of Contemporary Conservation. Srebnick, a good-natured native of Cuba who runs a zipper factory in Miami, picked Scheidemann up at his hotel and drove him to her house, on Millionaires' Row. Over a breakfast that started out dauntingly healthy (Srebnick served oatmeal and fruit, and offered a bottle of vitamins) and grew progressively less so (toast and eggs, Brie, chocolate-coated rugalach), owner and conservator discussed the state of the painting that Srebnick referred to as "my baby." It had been loaned to a gallery earlier in the year, Srebnick explained, and when the gallery had tried to return it her housekeeper had refused to sign for it, because the bottom edge of the painting was dotted with black spots.

As Scheidemann drank his coffee, he said, "After we fumigated it, there were still two live bugs on the stretcher." He paused. "Well, that's not a discussion for breakfast." The painting, he explained, had undergone earlier conservation treatment that had involved gluing a backing canvas to it. "The bugs like the glue," he said. "It's made from flour and animal glue. They aren't interested in the canvas, but they eat through the canvas to get the glue." His team had removed the secondary canvas and applied a new one, using thermal plastic. "There are no bugs in the world interested in that," he said.

"So it's the bugs eating the glue that makes the black marks?" Srebnick said.

"Actually, that's the excrement of the bugs," Scheidemann said calmly, and Srebnick leaned back in her chair, looking horrified.

After breakfast, Srebnick took Scheidemann for a walk around a new house, a few doors down, which she and Feldenkreis had recently bought and were in the midst of remodelling, in order to show him the wall where the Lam was to hang upon its return. The wall, the most prominent in the house, was nineteen feet tall and nine feet wide—much too large for the painting, and Scheidemann discreetly suggested that a wall off to the side might serve the work better. But Srebnick was insistent. "Unless I put it there, you don't see it when you walk in," she said. "I'm sorry, but it's going there." She drove Scheidemann downtown, and along the way they discussed the possible styles of frames in which the painting could be mounted after treatment. "And, if you could, just make the painting a bit bigger all the way around," she said.

Going to an art fair with Scheidemann, Ann Temkin told me, is "like going around a New England village with the doctor. Everyone stops to say hello, and he says, 'How's the baby?' 'How's grandfather?' " As Scheidemann strolled the aisles of the Miami Beach Convention Center, on the first day of the fair, he greeted dealers, and the occasional artist, in English and German. In the booth of Contemporary Fine Arts, we stopped in front of a piece by the German artist Georg Herold, which, like many of his works, featured spheres of caviar applied to a canvas. Scheidemann told me of consulting on a minor Herold painting, which a collector wished to donate to a museum, in order to obtain a tax deduction. The collector insisted that the canvas had once been covered with caviar, which had fallen off. Scheidemann concluded that there had never been any caviar, and the museum declined the donation. "You could tell this was not an interesting painting," he said.

At the Matthew Marks booth was a work by Ellsworth Kelly: an oil painting of a black-and-green cube. "These are the most difficult kinds of work to restore, because the finish is so perfect," Scheidemann said. "The problem is the same if someone scratches your car. To fill it and get the right gloss is very hard." The Guggenheim had recently held a symposium at which conservators examined the minimalist artist Ad Reinhardt's "Black Painting," which had been scratched during preparations for an exhibition and then subjected to misguided attempts at restoration. "It was a multimillion-dollar painting, and it was a total loss—the painting is totally dead," Scheidemann told me. "It is a good study for other paintings—like cutting open a body to look at the organs. But you would no more put it on your wall and say it is an Ad Reinhardt than you would unbury your grandfather's body and say it is your grandfather."

At the booth of Blum & Poe, a Los Angeles gallery, Scheidemann was introduced to the Japanese artist Takashi Murakami, whom he had never met, though he had treated several of his works. "We are the conservators of the mushroom sculptures," Scheidemann told him. "The mushrooms are very difficult to do." (They are coated in glossy polyurethane.) Murakami smiled broadly, and laughed. We next visited the booth of the London gallery White Cube, and looked at a "spot" painting by Damien Hirst, the contemporary artist who uses the most notoriously nontraditional materials. "We have worked on his paintings but not on the sculptures," Scheidemann said. "But, with the shark, it would have been better if he had called us." Hirst's most famous sculpture, "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living," a thirteen-foot tiger shark suspended in a bath of formaldehyde, was completed in 1991. Since then, it has suffered such serious deterioration that the shark has been replaced. "What he did with the shark was not very smart, but the artist is always right," Scheidemann said. "I think we would have tried to plastinate the shark—to exchange the bodily fluids with resin. But maybe that's too subtle for him. It would be a totally different work. I think he's more interested in keeping it difficult for a while."

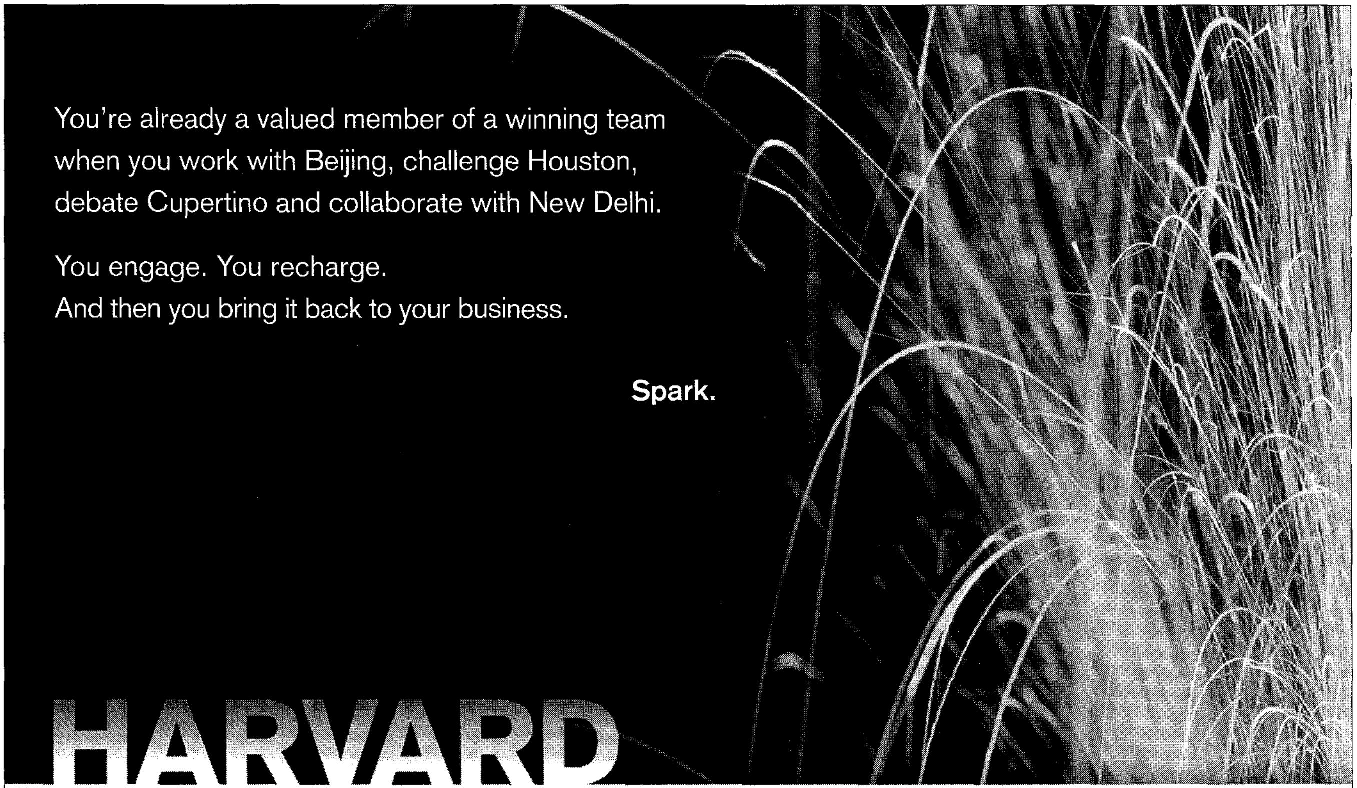
The next morning, Scheidemann and I took a cab to Key Biscayne to visit the house of Rosa de la Cruz, who opens her collection to the public during the fair. The house, which was flooded with light and was almost devoid of furniture, the better to display the art works, was buzzing with visitors. By a sitting room equipped with a couch, a flat-screen TV, and a series of panels that had been silk-screened with chocolate by Kelley Walker, Scheidemann was greeted warmly by Marty Eisenberg—a vice-president of Bed Bath & Beyond, and a client. Eisenberg recalled Scheidemann's efforts on a Manfred Pernice sculpture that he owned. "It was about a hundred degrees outside, and he was dressed in a shirt and pants, working on it with a hypodermic needle, while I was in the nice air-conditioned house," he said.

We walked through more rooms and looked at the art: a pendant sculpture, by Christian Holstad, which looks like an enormous knitted gas mask, hanging over the dining table, its trailing ropes presenting a challenge at mealtime; a work called "Untitled (Portrait of Dad)," by the late Cuban artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres, which consists of a pile of cellophane-wrapped white mint candies massed in the corner of a skylit atrium. Scheidemann picked a mint off the pile, unwrapped it, and popped it into his mouth. "Everyone is supposed to take one," he said, pronouncing it delicious. Tucked into another corner of the house, we found "M.K.N.Y.," the Martin Kippenberger painting. Contrary to Scheidemann's recommendation, the work was not framed.

Cruz was across the room, and came over to speak with Scheidemann. "See, it's in a good, safe place," she said. "It's not going to get hit by any ladies' handbags." As she went off to circulate among her guests, Scheidemann, who had been joined by a friend, Stefan Horsthemke—an art historian and the managing director of AXA Art, a German art-insurance company—spent a moment longer examining the painting, whose darkened layer of latex resembled a rumpled sheet. "You cannot restore latex, but you can protect it," Scheidemann said. "The most radical changes have already happened."

Horsthemke mentioned that he had recently seen an installation by Maurizio Cattelan called "Spermini," which consists of an array of diminutive latex masks of the sort that are sold for Halloween, painted with disparate masculine faces. "How long will *that* last?" he asked.

"If you keep it in cold storage with no oxygen, it will last," Scheidemann said, with a shrug. "Otherwise, it will probably fall apart. Nothing lasts forever." ♦



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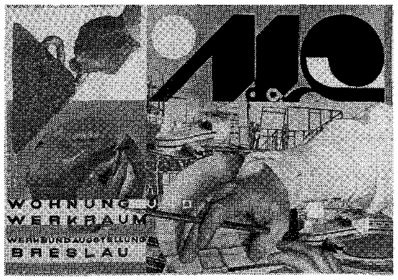

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DEPT. OF EDUCATION

THE INSTIGATOR

A crusader's plan to remake failing schools.

BY DOUGLAS McGRAY

Steve Barr stood in the breezeway at Alain Leroy Locke High School, at the edge of the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, on a February morning. He's more than six feet tall, with white-gray hair that's perpetually unkempt, and the bulk of an ex-jock. Beside him was Ramon Cortines—neat, in a trim suit—the Los Angeles Unified School District's new superintendent. Cortines had to be thinking about last May, when, as a senior deputy superintendent, he had visited under very different circumstances. That was when a tangle between two rival cliques near an outdoor vending machine turned into a fight that spread to every corner of the schoolyard. Police sent more than a dozen squad cars and surged across the campus in riot gear, as teachers grabbed kids on the margins and whisked them into locked classrooms.

The school's test scores had been among the worst in the state. In recent years, seventy-five per cent of incoming freshmen had dropped out. Only about three per cent graduated with enough credits to apply to a California state university. Two years ago, Barr had asked L.A.U.S.D. to give his charter-school-management organization, Green Dot Public Schools, control of Locke, and let him help the district turn it around. When the district refused, Green Dot became the first charter group in the country to seize a high school in a hostile takeover. ("He's a revolutionary," Nelson Smith, the president and C.E.O. of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, said.) Locke reopened in September, four months after the riot, as a half-dozen Green Dot schools.

"Last year, there was graffiti everywhere," Barr said. "You'd see kids everywhere—they'd be out here gambling. You'd smell weed." He recalled hearing movies playing in classroom after classroom: "People called it ghetto cineplex." Barr and Cortines walked to the quad, where the riot had started. The cracked pavement had been replaced by a lawn of thick green grass, lined with newly planted olive trees.

"It's night and day," Cortines said.

In the past decade, Barr has opened seventeen charter high schools—small, locally managed institutions that aim for a high degree of teacher autonomy and parent involvement—in some of the poorest neighborhoods in Los Angeles, as well as one in the Bronx. His charter-school group is now California's largest, by enrollment, and one of its most successful. Green Dot schools take kids who, in most cases, test far below grade level and send nearly eighty per cent of them to college. (Only forty-seven per cent of L.A.U.S.D. students graduate with a high-school diploma.) As of 2006, Green Dot's standardized-test scores were almost twenty per cent higher than L.A. Unified's average, and, adjusting for student demographics, the state Department of Education grades their performance a nine on a scale of one to ten; L.A.U.S.D. schools rate only a five.

Barr himself has a colorful reputation. He drives a decommissioned police car, a Crown Victoria with floodlights, which he bought from a friend, the former Fox executive who launched the network's reality show "Cops." ("It's faster than anything on the road," he told me, and when he wants to change lanes "people move out of the way.") He met his wife, an Alaskan radio reporter twenty years his junior, at a Burning Man festival seven years ago, and married her in Las Vegas three weeks later. And this is how he talks about working with what is arguably the country's most troubled big-city school system: "You ever see that movie 'Man on Fire,' with Denzel Washington? There's a scene in the movie where the police chief of Mexico City gets kidnapped by Denzel Washington. He wakes up, he's on the hood of his car under the underpass, in his boxers, his hands tied. Denzel Washington starts asking him questions, he's not getting the answers he wants, so he walks away from him, and leaves a bomb stuck up his ass." Barr laughed. "I don't want to blow up L.A.U.S.D.'s ass. But what will it take to get this system to serve who they need to serve? It's going to take that kind of aggressiveness."

Green Dot's ascent stems mostly from Barr's skill as an instigator and an organizer. Outrageous rhetoric is a big part of that, and it's not uncalculated. "It takes a certain amount of panache to call the head of the union a pig fucker," Ted Mitchell, the president of the California State Board of Education, said. (Those weren't Barr's words exactly.) "Steve has this 'Oh, shucks, you know me—I can't control my mouth' persona. It allows him to get away with murder." But, Mitchell points out, "he's a public curmudgeon and a private negotiator." And he has built Green Dot to be a political force unlike anything else in the world of education. For instance, Barr runs the only large charter organization in the country that has embraced unionized teachers and a collectively bargained contract—an unnecessary hassle, if his aim was to run a few schools, but a source of leverage for Green Dot's main purpose, which is to push for citywide change. "I don't see how you tip a system with a hundred per cent unionized labor without unionized labor," he said.

First period at Locke was ending. Kids swarmed the halls, shoving and laughing and posturing and flirting for every last second of their five minutes of freedom. Barr was quiet with Cortines, almost solicitous. Cortines, for his part, seemed eager for peace. After years of failed attempts to fix Locke, nobody could ignore how much Green Dot had accomplished in a matter of months.

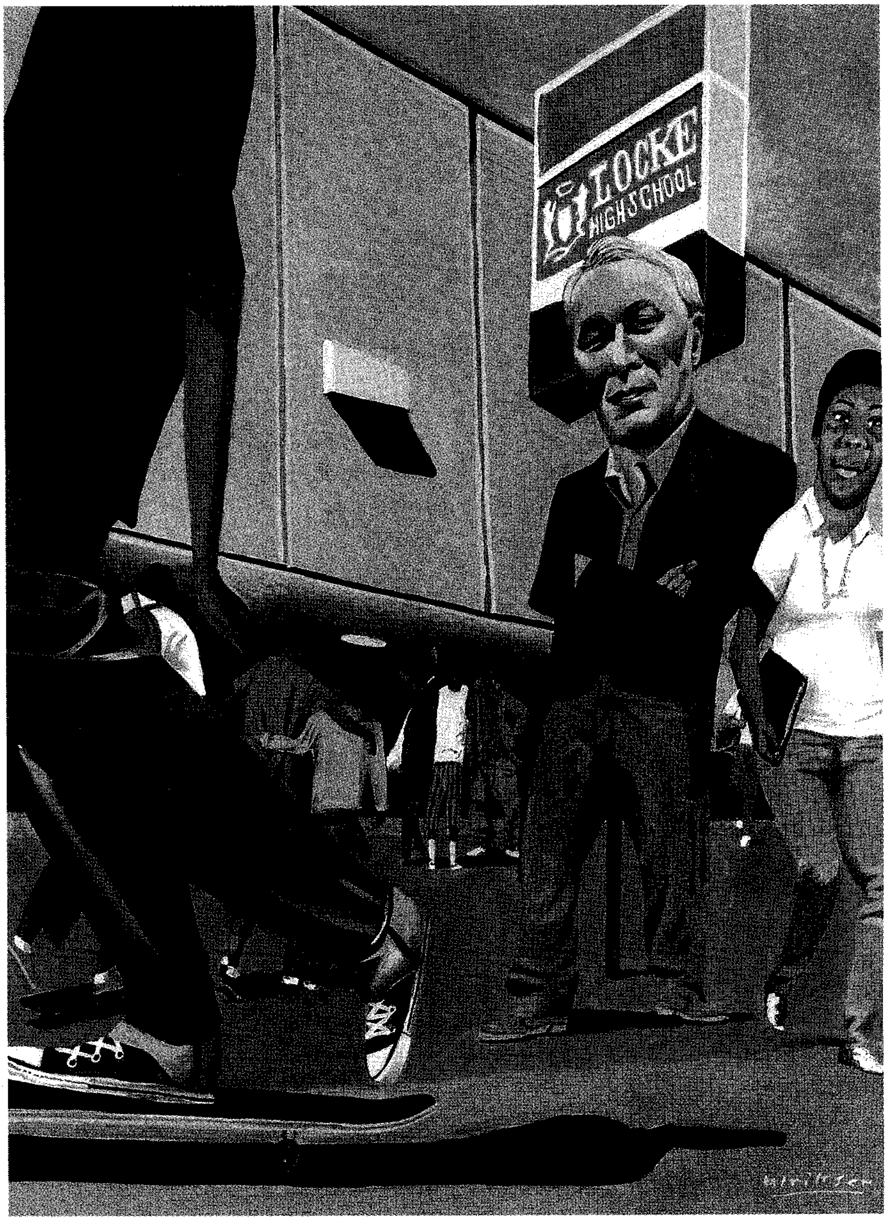
Another fight between Barr and L.A.U.S.D. seemed inevitable, though. After Cortines left, Barr said, "Ray and I have had conversations about Fremont High School," another large troubled school, in South Los Angeles. But Cortines, he knew, was hesitant. "I've been clear that we can talk," Cortines told me later. "I can't necessarily deliver. I still think we have to look at the evidence from Locke." Data like test scores, graduation rates, and student retention won't be available until later this year.

Barr doesn't want to hear it. "Nobody can tell me that a small, autonomous, well-funded school, where the parents are involved, where accountability is put on that staff, is not the right way to go," he said. "We get along really well, but I get fucking impatient."

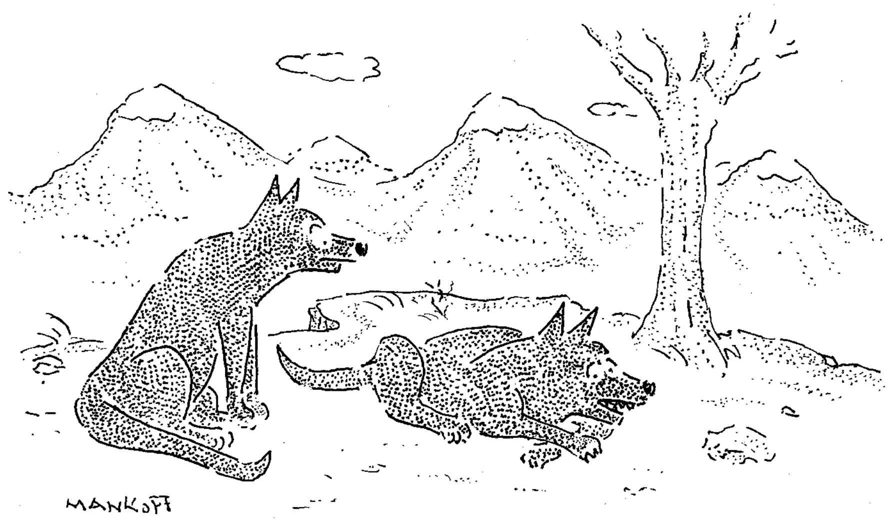
Cortines didn't know that Barr was already planning his next assault on the district, one he described to me as "Armageddon." He planned to target five to ten of the largest, worst-performing schools in Los Angeles, and then submit a hundred charters for new schools to be clustered around them. Then he would give the district a choice: it could either dissolve most of the central bureaucracy, and turn over hiring, firing, and spending decisions to neighborhood schools, or surrender leadership of the schools to Green Dot. If the district refused both options, Barr would open his new schools and begin stealing thousands of students, and the millions of dollars in funding that follow them. "If I take ten Locke High Schools, they can't survive," he said.

But, just weeks after Cortines's visit to Locke, Barr got a call from the new Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. He flew to Washington, D.C., at the end of March, for what he expected to be a social visit. At the meeting, Duncan revealed that he was interested in committing several billion dollars of the education stimulus package to a Locke-style takeover and transformation of the lowest-performing one per cent of schools across the country, at least four thousand of them, in the next

MARK ULRIKSEN



Steve Barr used bare-knuckle political tactics to take over a Los Angeles school.



"I huffed and I puffed and I blew their house down, and now my head's hot and I ache all over."

several years. The Department of Education would favor districts that agreed to partner with an outside group, like Green Dot. "You seem to have cracked the code," Duncan told Barr.

Duncan was interested in the fact that Barr was targeting high schools, not elementary or middle schools. "The toughest work in urban education today is what you do with large failing high schools," Duncan told me. These schools get less study and less attention from charter groups and education reformers, most of whom feel that ninth grade is too late to begin saving kids. "Teach for America, NewSchools Venture Fund, the Broad Foundation—all these folks are doing extraordinary work in public education," Duncan said. "Nobody national is turning around large failing high schools."

When Barr got back to Los Angeles, he told me, "We're being asked, 'Could you guys do five schools in L.A. next year? Could you expand beyond L.A.?' If you'd asked a month ago, 'What about Green Dot America?,' I would have said, 'No way.' But if this President wants to get after it I'm going to reconsider."

Barr opened his first school in August of 2000, at the edge of Lennox, a poor, mostly Spanish-speaking community near Los Angeles International Airport, under a landing path. The local high school, Hawthorne, was a few miles away. "Where the Beach Boys went," Barr said. "Now it's a dropout factory."

He announced plans for the school at a middle-school gymnasium crowded with families. "I told the parents, 'When you come to this school, seven thousand dollars follows you' "—the rough sum that California paid a charter school to educate a child. " 'That's your money. I will treat that like tuition.'" He promised them a school that was safe, local, and accountable. He said he'd need their help. And he gave everyone his home phone number and said that they could call him anytime. By the end of the night, he had a hundred and forty kids committed to his ninth-grade class. Suddenly, he said, "I started shaking."

"I'm standing in front of these parents, who have no money—all they have is their kids," he recalled. "And they're trusting me. I didn't have a facility yet, and I didn't have a staff. It was February, and school was opening in August. I walked out to the parking lot and threw up."

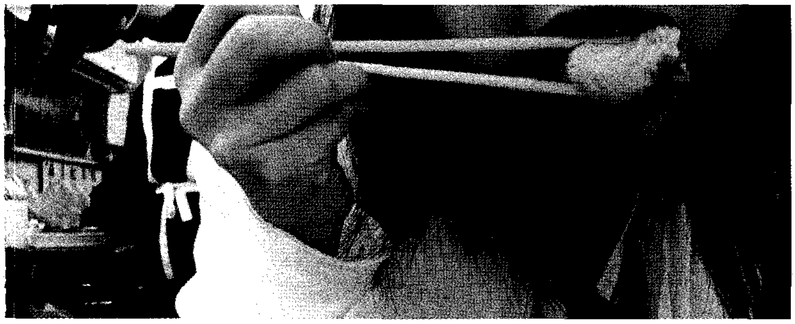
Opening a school was an unlikely move for Barr. He had done fund-raising for California politicians, helped organize the Olympic-torch relay before the 1984 Summer Games, and spent three years as an on-air television reporter. He co-founded Rock the Vote, and worked on Bill Clinton's 1992 Presidential campaign. But he'd never thought much about education. In fact, he'd been a mediocre student.

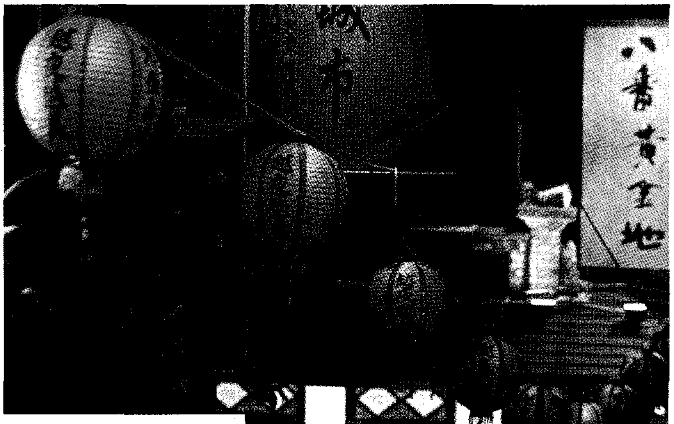
Barr was born in 1959, just south of San Francisco, and lived with his mother in Monterey, near the military base, where she worked as a dental assistant and a cocktail waitress. When he was six, he and his younger brother spent a year in foster care. Later, they made their home in a trailer in Missouri, before moving back to California.

In school, Barr was a good athlete, and popular. Every teacher knew his name. His brother, Mike, was quiet and overweight. Mike tried playing in the band for a while. ("Why do you give the chubby kid a tuba?" Barr asked, sighing. "Do you know how hilarious it is seeing a chubby kid try to get on the bus with a tuba?") But soon Mike got lost in their large high school. Steve graduated, and went on to the University of California at Santa Barbara. Mike dropped out, and never really settled into an adult life. Eventually, he was in a motorcycle accident. After a series of surgeries, he lost his leg. He won a settlement, but that attracted the wrong friends. "You take a poor kid who has problems and give him a lot of money . . ." Barr said. When Barr was thirty-two, Mike died of a drug overdose. His mother died shortly afterward, and Barr began to drift.

He discovered charter schools by accident. When President Clinton went to San Carlos to visit California's first charter school, Barr tagged along, and encountered the school's founder, Don Shalvey, and a Silicon Valley businessman, Reed Hastings, who had just founded Netflix. Shalvey and Hastings were about to draw up a ballot initiative that would increase the number of charter schools in California. Barr decided to help. "He came out of nowhere," Hastings said. And he brought a very different approach. He persuaded them, for instance, to try to make peace with the California Teachers Association. "He helped us realize we were perhaps overly simplistic in demonizing the union as the enemy," Hastings said. "It turned out C.T.A. was open to a stronger charter law."

As Barr worked on the campaign, he started to think about his own years in school, and his brother's. High school, he decided, was the point where their lives diverged. When the charter-school mea-





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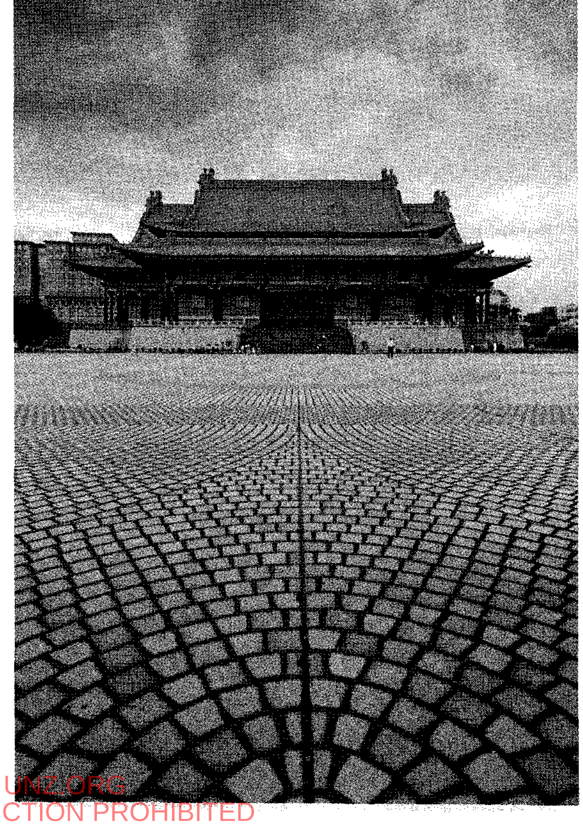
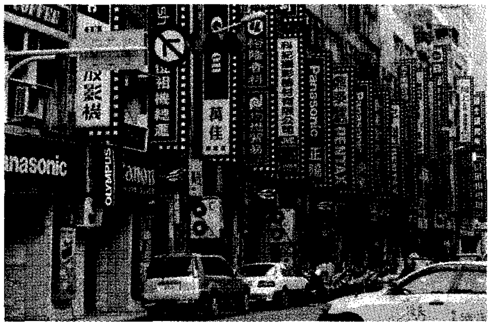
In the fourth of our ongoing six-part series on Taiwan, travel writer Rudy Maxa shares recollections of his recent visit to vibrant Taipei, a throbbing metropolis of modern flourishes and revered landmarks.

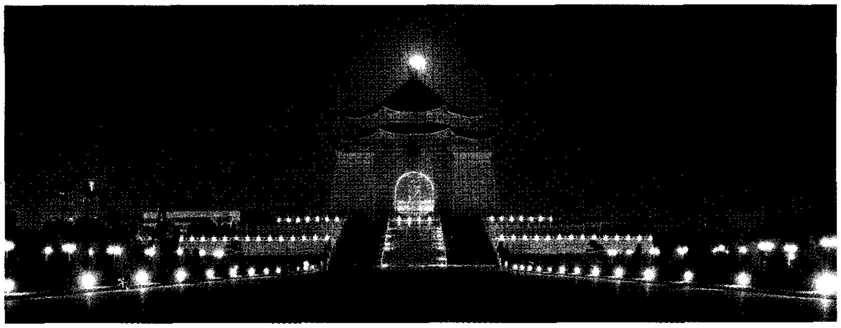


Gateway to Taiwan

IF FOOD AND SHOPPING are the twin passions of the Taiwanese, Taipei delivers mightily on both counts. Add to those attributes a strong commitment to Asian culture—exemplified by the stunning National Palace Museum, which houses one of the world's largest collections of Chinese artifacts—and Taipei ranks as one of the great capitals of the world.

It was a balmy winter evening when I landed in Taipei. On the drive to my hotel in town, I was struck by lush greenery that covered the hills surrounding the city. Broad, landscaped boulevards with mature trees lining the sidewalks at times reminded me more of Europe than Asia. My host suggested dinner at the **Landis Taipei**, a five-star member of The Leading Hotels of the World. Its Chinese restaurant, **Tien Hsiang Lo**, is renowned locally, and I enjoyed a several-course meal that included a slow-braised pork belly.





But as I learned over the course of the next several days, in Taipei you can dine in the elegance of a restaurant like Tien Hsiang Lo, or just as easily delight in freshly grilled street fare amid the organized chaos of the **Shilin Night Market,** where hundreds of stalls attract crowds from 6 P.M. to after midnight. There, under the glow of brightly illuminated store signs, shoppers sample oyster omelets, "bubble" tea, braised stinky tofu, and the Taiwan version of the hot dog, a small pork sausage wrapped in a sticky-rice blanket topped with your choice of soy sauce, wasabi, garlic, or pickled bok choy. (While here, look for the line by the Yang Ming movie theater where eager devotees queue up for juicy fried chicken.)

In Taipei's oldest neighborhood, Wanhua, visitors can easily pass the evening hours wandering **Snake Alley,** also known as the Huaxi Night Market. You can still sample this writhing delicacy, but there's less snake and sin here than there was decades ago, and it's still the place to find everything from traditional Chinese medicine shops and video games to reflexology clinics. The nearby **Longshan Temple,** dating back to 1738, Taiwan's most famous temple and blessed "meeting place of the deities," is known for its intricate stone sculptures, wood carvings, and bronze work. Here you can burn incense as an offering, and fortune-telling sticks are available for tossing if you would like to know your future.

In Taipei, related stores often cluster together, and getting around the city to different neighborhoods is a breeze thanks to a modern mass rapid transit system (MRT) that runs both aboveground and underground. It is spotless, punctual, boasts signage in English, and is the envy of the world. Not far from the Presidential Office Building, I strolled through the camera and computer districts, where dozens of shops stretch for blocks. Need repairs done in a hurry? Technicians can often make fixes on the spot.

Then there's the offbeat: a restaurant chain with plumbing-fixture décor, where soup and noodle dishes are presented in small bathtubs; another eaterie's interior is designed to replicate the fuselage of a plane. At **Baby Boss City** at the Core Pacific Living Mall, kids can don a chef's uniform and make pizzas or become an astronaut for an afternoon. Participants earn "Baby Boss Money" for "learning" a trade from staffers called "bro/sisters," but visit with a bilingual local as the bro/sisters don't instruct in English.

For high-end shopping, the mall in Taipei's showpiece skyscraper **Taipei 101** offers internationally known designer and couture stores as well as an upscale food court featuring Taiwanese, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indian cuisine. The young and trendy **Ximending** shopping district is a buzzing neon-lit collection of boutiques and pedestrian malls. For a quieter option, head to nearby Chongqing South Road, nicknamed **Book Street** for the dozens of bookstores, most specializing in specific topics such as calligraphy or medicine. A wider selection (some in English) can be found at the flagship seven-story **Eslite,** part of a popular bookstore chain, open 24/7 near the Ximen metro station.

And, finally, on anyone's must-see list in Taipei, along with the **National Palace Museum** and its nearly 650,000 Chinese artifacts, is a trove of other cultural attractions. The **National Museum of History** holds more antiquities brought to Taiwan from mainland China, and a guided tour in English begins every day at three. The museum is adjacent to the twenty-acre **Botanical Garden**—don't miss the Lotus Pond in the summer when red, white, and yellow water lilies are in bloom.

The **National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall** is set in the east end of the park that includes the **National Theater Hall** and **National Concert Hall**, two buildings that are the centerpieces for the city's performing arts. Inside the memorial to the former president of Taiwan, outsized rooms feature a photographic history of his tenure, two of his bulletproof Cadillac limousines, and artwork of his era. At night, the golden and red façades of the two performing arts centers are dramatically lit; various performances take place nearly every day or evening. Elsewhere downtown, the **Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall** is a tribute to the father of modern China, who helped bring an end to China's dynasties. Children fly kites in the vast courtyard, and small crowds gather nightly for a changing of the guard.

When I returned from Taiwan and friends asked me to describe the city of Taipei in one sentence, I said, "Go for the history, but stay for the food."

Next month, Rudy Maxa's feature will focus entirely on Taiwan's cuisine.

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Touch Your Heart

sure passed, he broke up with his girlfriend, moved out of their apartment, gave up his convertible, and rented a decrepit place in Venice, sight unseen. He moved in on Christmas morning, to a room strewn with needles, vomit, and feces. "I'm thirty-nine, I'm alone," he said. "Merry fucking Christmas." He tied his chocolate Lab, Jerry Brown, in the corner, put on the Harry Belafonte album his mother used to play every Saturday morning, when they did chores together, and scrubbed the apartment.

A year and a half later, he opened Animo Leadership Charter High School, near Lennox. (He said that in Spanish *animo* can mean "courage" or "valor," but he prefers a Mexican surfing buddy's translation: "Get off your ass.") He hired five of his seven teachers straight out of college and rented classrooms at a night school. When one of the teachers quit in the first couple of weeks, he replaced her with his office manager. Barr worked mostly without pay for the next few years, spending the last of his savings and his brother's settlement, and doing such damage to his finances that Costco revoked his membership. He pitched in a lot himself. "Maybe the most fun I had was going to test-drive school buses," he said.

And he starting a surfing club. "There were a handful of kids at the school who were really fricking cool but weren't being reached somehow," he said. "There was a kid named Ricky. He was smart, charismatic. All the girls loved this guy. There was another girl named Stephanie, who I think had a crush on Ricky." They agreed to find twenty-five kids who would show up before school, at 6 A.M.

"We were driving to the South Bay, Manhattan Beach. It was real quiet," Barr recalled. "Halfway out there, one of the kids said, 'Mr. Barr, do you have to know how to swim to surf?'" Half the kids couldn't. Barr put his head in his hands and laughed.

"The Manhattan Beach school system, they actually have surfing in gym class, so you have all these blond-haired, blue-eyed kids in the water," Barr continued. "And here come these kids from Lennox. The Lennox surf team." He mimicked a slow, tough walk. "Their gear's a little off, you know, they're all Latino, and a couple of black kids. I remember them getting triple takes."

At the end of its first chaotic year, Barr's school beat Hawthorne High School in every measurable outcome. "When the scores come out, I have to call Shalvey"—Barr's charter-school mentor—"and ask him, 'Are they good?' " Barr said. " 'Cause I don't fucking know. I don't know how to read test scores." The night school eventually moved, and Animo Leadership took over the entire campus. Last year, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked it among the top hundred public high schools in the country.

A pair of skinny Latino boys with shoulder-length hair cruised down Locke's breezeway on their skateboards. Zeus Cubias, an assistant principal, turned and glared. It was a few minutes after the last bell, and the two kids had swapped their uniform polos for black band T-shirts.

"What did I tell you? Don't act the fool," Cubias said sternly, as the boys picked up their skateboards. He turned to the taller boy. "Especially when you're wearing a Guns N' Roses shirt. Don't embarrass the shirt." The boy laughed. "Next time, I'm taking boards," Cubias said.

Cubias is compact and athletic, with floppy hair, a tidy beard, and three earrings. "I'd be doing the same thing when I was a kid," he admitted. He grew up just a few blocks down the street, and graduated from Locke, class of '92. He showed me his freshman yearbook. "Here's the Jheri Curl mullet," he said, flipping through the faces. "Ghetto business in the front, ghetto party in the back. And here's me, sporting my own mullet."

The high school opened in 1967, two years after the Watts riots. Named for Alain Leroy Locke, the country's first African-American Rhodes Scholar, it was set on a twenty-six-acre plot near the edge of the neighborhood, and was meant to be a symbol of rebirth. But by the time Cubias was a freshman, jobs and middle-class families had disappeared; the school, like the neighborhood, became infamous. Security guards with metal-detecting wands would interrupt class to spot-check boys.

As a freshman, Cubias landed in remedial and English as a Second Language classes. "I had a Spanish name," he said. Most Latinos in Watts were recent immigrants, and there were so many kids, and so few counsellors, that it was hard to keep everyone straight. Locke had grown huge. Los Angeles went more than thirty years without building a new high school, even as the city's population swelled; schools like Locke, meant for about fifteen hundred kids, doubled their enrollment, packing classrooms and erecting cheap, prefabricated units in their parking lots. Cubias ditched class a lot and got bad grades. But a substitute covering his English class thought he seemed out of place and recommended him for an honors class. When he showed up the first day, he recalled, he met a girl with black hair and *ojos tapatíos*—almond-shaped eyes—who carried a novel wherever she went. He was smitten. "I had heard about kids who read books, but they were, like, mythical," Cubias said, laughing. He asked a counsellor to give him the same class schedule as the girl, and in that instant he passed from one world to another. She took all honors classes, on her way to graduating as valedictorian.

"These poor high schools, you have an Advanced Placement track, and the teachers only believe in triage, so they put the kids who have a chance in that track," Barr explained. "It's built on the back of the other three tracks."

Cubias ended up scoring a 5 on his A.P. calculus exam, which no Locke student had ever done before, and went to the University of California at Santa Barbara. Even before he left Locke, he knew that he wanted to come back and teach there. "Now, I'm bilingual, and a math teacher, with a University of California certification," Cubias said. "In this district, I'm gold." But when he first went downtown to apply for a teaching position and said that he wanted a job at Locke he was told, "You don't have to teach there. You're qualified to teach at this place, or this place, or this place."

The interviewer thought she was doing him a favor. "These schools like Locke and Fremont and Jordan, they just get the leftovers," Cubias said. Locke would have substitutes covering unfilled teaching positions well into the school year. New hires were often uninspiring and unprepared. "Damn the day the University of Phoenix started offering teaching credentials," he added.

In the spring of 2007, a rumor spread through the school. Teachers and parents were summoned to a community meeting at the middle school down the street. The room was packed. Cubias took a seat near the front. The superintendent at the time got up to speak. He said that the district was interested in handing over leadership of Locke High School to a charter organization, Green Dot.

For Cubias, this was worse than neglect—to be abandoned by the district and relegated to some white guy he'd never met. "We'll see about that," he said.

The sudden announcement stunned United Teachers Los Angeles, the neighborhood, and Locke's staff, even the principal. Almost immediately, the superintendent began shying away from the deal. Barr had learned by now to have a backup plan ready. If the district refused to give him Locke, he'd just open a bunch of Green Dot schools in Watts and take the kids.

Green Dot had become more professional since Barr's early days at Animo Leadership. But it had also become more radical. When case-study writers from Harvard Business School asked Barr to describe the inspiration behind Green Dot's model, he didn't cite other schools; he named the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He hired an opposition researcher to investigate Green Dot and see what enemies might use against him. He started a citywide group called the Los Angeles Parents Union, an activist alternative to the Parent-Teacher Association, in the hope of mobilizing foot soldiers for Green Dot's escalating war against the district. He even put a school-board member on his payroll—"a mole," Barr said—to report back on closed meetings. Judged purely on test scores, or scholastic reputation, another group, Alliance for College-Ready Public Schools, is probably the premier charter-school-management organization in Los Angeles. "They're brilliant about academics," Barr said. But, as a political organization that happens to run great schools, Green Dot is unique.

As Barr became more political, he began to worry about the limits of the charter movement. "There's this cult around charter schools," Barr said. "They're not even close to being the answer." Opening a new school like Animo Leadership takes an enormous amount of effort and money. Barr has to find a big building in the right neighborhood, and convert it into classrooms, and fill it with new teachers and administrators, and sell the idea to parents and community leaders. This is all before any public dollars arrive. Four years after Barr started Animo Leadership, he had a nice school of about five hundred students. But that barely registered in a district with around seven hundred thousand. Barr began to covet district schools with thousands of students. (Locke had almost three thousand.) "We were trying to figure out how to get out of the charter-school business, and how to get into the helping-schools-transform business," he said.

Barr tested a new strategy at Jefferson High School, a place that is much like Locke, a few miles to the north. In 2005, over the course of a year, he met with the superintendent to try to negotiate a deal to transform the institution into a series of small autonomous schools. When talks broke down, Barr hired a field staff from the neighborhood. They worked out of a housing project across the street from the school and collected ten thousand signatures from local parents. When the district still balked, Barr gathered a thousand parents and marched to L.A.U.S.D.'s central office, towing the paperwork for five new Green Dot schools in little red wagons. Jefferson remained an L.A.U.S.D. school. But the following fall more than half of its incoming freshmen entered the lottery for a spot at one of Barr's schools. "When Green Dot was able to walk into a neighborhood, build strong coalitions with neighborhood groups, and begin to drain the school, I think that sent a shock wave through the system," Ted Mitchell, the president of the State Board of Education, said.

Barr was ready to do the same thing at Locke. "What I didn't foresee was the teachers rising up," he said. A group from the school—Zeus Cubias and a few others—sent word that they wanted a meeting. Barr agreed to meet them at a nearby community center. Fifty or sixty teachers sat on one side, in a semicircle; Barr sat alone, facing them.

"Locke is a cash cow," he explained to them. It attracted more state and federal funding than schools in richer neighborhoods—"money-that's-thrown-at-a-failed-school kind of money," he said. "According to our analysis, only about sixty per cent of that money makes it into the classroom."

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has layer upon layer of bureaucracy. Locke had two full-time employees who painted over graffiti. Bathroom monitors were contractually limited to bathroom-related supervision. Locke often came in well under budget, yet students still shared textbooks, because the surplus was locked up in some unnecessary line item. Byzantine chains of accountability made it almost impossible to isolate problems and fix them.

"There was yelling back and forth," Barr said. "A lot of the time I just sat there, let them work their shit out. A young Latino math teacher, big guy, fucking six foot five, he broke down and started crying." The teacher feared that although Green Dot might get more kids to college, the most vulnerable kids, the hardest cases, might slip away. It's a big knock against charter schools—sometimes fair, sometimes unfair—that only a traditional public school teaches all kids. "We bombarded him," Cubias said. Barr came back with the same answer again and again: "How will it be worse than what you have now?"

Even if they agreed about the district's ills, many teachers worried about Green Dot's contract. At around thirty pages, it would be *only* a tenth as long as their contract with L.A.U.S.D. "Union contracts are written in response to bad systems," Barr said. (A. J. Duffy, the president of United Teachers Los Angeles, counters, "Our view of a decent contract is it will provide longevity of teaching staff." Too many charter schools, he argues, churn through young teachers.) Green Dot offered no tenure and no lifetime benefits. But salaries would be about ten per cent higher; it spends more than sixty per cent of its staff budget on teacher salaries, a good deal more than L.A.U.S.D., Green Dot claims. Green Dot's union—affiliated with the statewide teachers' association rather than with the more defensive one in Los Angeles—would protect them from arbitrary dismissal. And Barr promised teachers more freedom in the classroom. At his schools, the principals lay out firm curricular guidelines, in keeping with California state standards and Green Dot benchmarks, but teachers are free to huddle, and decide what to teach and how to teach it, for the most part, as long as students pass quarterly assessments.

"After about five and a half hours, one teacher said, 'Let's face it, the only time the district comes out here is when a kid gets killed,'" Barr recalled. "Another teacher said, 'And the only time our union comes out is when Green Dot's mentioned.' Somebody said, 'What can we do?'"

Barr explained that California lawmakers had created an option for schools to abandon the district for a charter arrangement if at least fifty per cent of tenured teachers vote to secede. "We'd be interested in that," Barr said.

Barr had a stack of petition forms sent to the school. Cubias, an English teacher named Bruce Smith, and the principal, Frank Wells, began circulating them. Barr wasn't sure he had the votes. Locke's young teachers were mostly untenured and ineligible. The older faculty tended to be deeply skeptical of what Barr was selling. "A lot of these teachers have been on the front lines during the whole demise of our public education system," he said. "Now, every year or two, there's some new reform. You get reform fatigue: 'Oh, God, another God-damned bright idea from the business world.'" Out of a total tenured faculty of seventy-three, Barr needed thirty-seven votes to take the school. That meant all the eligible younger teachers and a decent number of the older ones. Smith and Wells started canvassing between bells. "It was a sneaky inside job, but there was no other way to do it," Smith said.

District administrators were furious. They sent school police to find Wells and escort him off school property. But it was too late: Barr's allies had the signatures. Two days later, television crews gathered across the street for a press conference. Kids milled around and stared. Smith sneaked into a bathroom to write a speech. "I've got security guards carrying walkie-talkies, saying, 'He's walking down the hall,'" Smith recalled. "I'm pretty nervous." He hid in a stall, and scribbled notes for his remarks on an index card: "Do what we're doing: take back your schools."

Within days, the district and the teachers' union counterattacked. "To take over a whole school—it was scandalous!" Karen Wickhorst, a French teacher and, at the time, a site representative for United Teachers Los Angeles, recently recalled. "A big public school! It was so underhanded."

The district banned Barr from the

DINER
Not saying much, are they?
TRY OUR "BETTER THAN SEX" CHOCOLATE CAKE

school and summoned teachers to a meeting. Duffy, the union president, and the district's regional administrator addressed the teachers. "They scared the shit out of everyone," Barr said. Seventeen teachers revoked their signatures.

Barr set up a war room at Green Dot's offices. He wrote the number "17" on a whiteboard. Organizers mapped out the teachers who had rescinded their votes—their issues, their biases—as well as new teachers they might swing. "It was like chasing down Senate votes," Barr said. He got up at five, and met teachers at a doughnut shop before school. He went to their houses for dinner, and showed up at church on Sunday. Allies would sneak him onto the school grounds through a back gate, and he'd hold court in a gym teacher's office.

They got all seventeen votes back—but not one more. And Barr began to look ahead. "After the press conference, a dozen different schools contacted me," he said. They were ready to lead their own insurrections. "If I'd been prepared, I could have run the table," Barr said.

Some of his closest confidants, though, worried that even one big high school might be too many. "Most people around him, including me, said, 'Oh, man, Locke is going to kill you,'" Reed Hastings, of Netflix, said. "Creating new schools is easy politics. It's ribbon-cutting, it's new opportunities. Taking over a school—it's district property, those are union jobs. I was afraid he would put in a lot of effort and not succeed. Or he'd get the conversion done and the difficulty of running the school would overwhelm him. And if he did a bad job it would be a black mark for everyone."

A tall girl, her hair pulled back tightly in a ponytail, reached up to tape a bright hand-painted poster ("Valentines Day Candygrams") above a row of lockers.

"You're showing your butt crack," a boy walking by said.

"So? Everyone has one."

"I don't."

"Idiot." She rolled her eyes. The boy looked back over his shoulder and grinned.

Locke's hallways are now filled with these handmade signs—for dances, tryouts, movie nights, college tours. They used to be banned; kids would vandalize them. Instead, there was graffiti. "Everywhere you walked," Shannan Burrell, a junior, said. "About six out of ten, it was gang tags."

Shannan is curvy and baby-faced, with rosy brown skin. Her hair was in a bright-purple wrap. She lived nearby, with her mother, in a yellow house, close enough to walk to school in the morning (keeping quiet, looking straight ahead) but outside Locke's immediate neighborhood, which was a good thing. "It's dirty," she said. "Gangbangers out 24/7." She wears a necklace that spells out the name "Jerome" in curling, glittering script. He was her best friend, before he was shot and killed around the corner, when she was in ninth grade. "It was random," she said softly. "He was a schoolboy, for real."

When she entered Locke, three years ago, she liked it. "It was fun—wandering around the halls, around the campus," she said. "Just wilding out." She'd drop into classroom after classroom, looking for friends. "Like 'Come outside real quick,'" she said, laughing. "Quick" usually meant for the rest of class. "And we wouldn't just go to our lunch—we'd go to all of them," she said. "Why are we going to go to class if nobody ever says nothing?" But in her sophomore year she started getting in fights. "I felt like, at Locke, you have to earn your reputation," she explained. "And I earned mine, after like my third fight. But then, after that, it seemed like girls wanted to challenge me. So it got worse." She fought once or twice a week. Her grades were terrible.

She was eating with the football players, in the shade of the quad's only tree, when the riot began. Suddenly, everyone around her was fighting. A boy she'd never seen before punched her. "I wanted to cry, bad," she said. "But it ain't inside me to cry." Instead, she fought back. A few weeks later, she left her mother's house and moved in with her adult sister, about an hour away. But in the fall she decided to go back to Locke. She'd heard that there were going to be changes.

Old-timers and union loyalists who left Locke after the takeover insisted that Green Dot would find a way to weed out problem kids. Others, such as Cubias, worried that uniforms and the promise of tougher discipline would simply keep bad kids away. But teachers and administrators went out into the neighborhood to visit hundreds of parents and students and encourage them to reënroll. Eighty-five per cent of Locke students returned. (In a normal year, only seventy per cent would come back from summer break.) That meant hundreds more than either Green Dot or the city had projected.

"When I got to school, I was laughing at everyone else—I was, like, 'Ha, you got on a uniform,'" Shannan said. "They're, like, 'Ha, you got on a uniform, too!'" Green Dot split the incoming ninth grade into five new small schools, like the schools around Jefferson. Three of them ended up in buildings off campus; the other two were in Locke's prefabricated units, walled off by tall black fences. Then they split the upper three grades into two academies, one for each wing of Locke's original building. Each school had its own bell schedule, its own lunch period, its own entrance, and its own color polo shirt. Shannan drew white.

Locke's teachers were all dismissed

OBSCURITY AND REGRET

The hand without the glove screws down the lid
on the jar of caterpillars, but the apple trees
are already infested. The sun mottles
the ground. The leaves are half-dead.
A shoe stomps the larvae streaming
onto the lawn as if putting out a cigarette on a rug.
It was a stupid idea. It was a stupid thing to say
the thought belonging to the body says to its source
stomping on the bright-green grass as it spills its sweet guts.

—*C. D. Wright*

and asked to reapply. Only about thirty per cent got their jobs back. Shannan's English teacher, Mr. Sully, was one of them. "He just, he a nice teacher," she said. "He keep you on your toes. If you ain't doing something, he'll make you do something." Dozens of kids told me this—that teachers make them do stuff now, whether they want to or not. Almost immediately, Shannan stopped ditching. For one thing, she couldn't get away with it anymore. ("They don't play," she said.) She stopped fighting, too.

Sully passed a new novel out to Shannan's class—"a book called 'The Bluest Eye,' " Shannan said. She was unimpressed with the cover and the first page. "I was like, 'Mr. Sully, this book about to be stooopid.' And he said, 'What did I say?' And I said, 'O.K., I won't use "stupid," but this book is about to be not interesting.' He sat me down and had a strong conversation with me." She agreed to give it a few pages. Then the character Claudia, a fighter, made her first appearance. "I hear her talk about beating up a girl name Rosemary, a little white girl. I was like, 'Oh, I'm going to read this!' " She giggled. "It's turned out to be a good book," she said. "That's the funny thing."

"There is no secret curriculum-and-instruction sauce at Green Dot at all," Don Shalvey said. "Steve hires good people. They're just doing old-school schooling."

Shannan doesn't like every class. Physics, she said, is boring. So is a test-preparation and college-readiness class, mandatory for most Green Dot students. But she tries to do the work now. When I asked her why, she thought about it for a long time. "Honestly, it didn't matter how you did before," she said. "Wasn't nobody really looking at Locke kids"—meaning to go to college. That's not true, of course, but it felt true to Shannan. "Now, if I make a bad grade, I'm like, 'Please, can I make it up?' "

There are problems that Green Dot can't fix on its own, however. According to Cubias, at least forty per cent of Locke's students come from single-parent households. "Another fifteen per cent are in foster care," he said. Green Dot requires parents to get involved at school, a minimum of thirty-five hours a year, but they can't make every parent a good influence. (Recently, after a girl tangled with a classmate, an assistant principal called the girl's mother, and when the woman showed up she started screaming at the other student.) Security can stop neighborhood gangs from tagging the halls or hoisting couches up to Locke's roof, which was a hangout last year, but they can't keep gangs out of kids' lives.

I made plans to attend classes with Shannan the next day, but when I arrived at her first-period class, English with Mr. Sully, she wasn't there. I called her house after school. The phone line was dead. (Her mother, a quiet, serious woman, has been out of work for at least two years. Her father has been in jail since around the time Shannan was a toddler.) When we finally talked, her voice was so flat that I didn't recognize it.

"I'm not going to be in school this week," she said. "I have to take care of family business."

"Did someone get hurt?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Was it a car accident or something?"

"Much worse," she said. "It's not something I want to talk about." Several days passed before she returned to classes.

There remain problems to address inside Locke, too. Fall semester was difficult. "We made so many mistakes," Cubias said. September was almost wholly devoted to coping with the crush of unexpected students. Administrators struggled to find good teachers who were still on the job market. Clubs and activities suffered. "It's hard to see incremental changes," a new principal, Veronica Coleman, said. "That turned into some low-level frustration for both students and teachers."

Sully told me that Locke is significantly calmer, and administrators are more present. And Green Dot got rid of the teachers who did little for students. But the takeover also chased away some good, experienced staff. Locke's overwhelmingly new and mostly young faculty members are learning how to work together. Sully still has problems with chronic truancy. He still sees kids out of uniform. And when Locke's test scores, their first since the takeover, come back this fall they are almost certain to be the lowest among Barr's schools. Sully guesses that the school might see a small bounce, but anything more than that would surprise him. Kids in Locke's

Shanahan
Danny Shanahan, 2005

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upper grades have spent as many as three years in one of the city's worst academic environments. And, for the first time at a Green Dot school, there is no lottery process for admission. There is no waiting list. Locke is serving every kid in the neighborhood, including ones whose parents, in another neighborhood, would never research alternatives to the big traditional school. "Every child who is in his other schools is there because they have an advocate," Cortines said. "Not so at Locke. They took the whole population."

Even security remains a challenge. Green Dot blanketed the schoolyard with guards from a private security firm, club-bouncer burly, carrying handguns and pepper spray. Gangs have nowhere near the profile they once did, and fights, once a daily occurrence, are rare. Still, in mid-April, a student was shot, across the street, just before first period. And guards have occasionally displayed a heavy hand. Twice this year, they pepper-sprayed students; in both cases, Cubias said, they should have been able to cool the kids down before it came to that, but they were trained to secure facilities, not to supervise adolescents.

Yet, when I wandered around campus during lunch periods and between classes, looking for disgruntled kids, I never found any.

"The whole atmosphere is different," a Latino boy, sketching graffiti in a notebook, said. "The teachers pay more attention to you."

"You actually get through the lessons you're supposed to get through," Jamie, an African-American girl with straightened swept-back hair, said, as she picked at French fries with her friend Andrea.

"I noticed that, too," Andrea said.

"Last year, my grades got so bad—I got four D's! My will to get good grades improved," Jamie said.

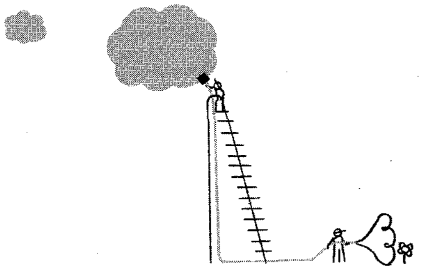
"Will Locke be perfect?" Cortines asked. "I don't care. If they make mistakes, they'll find a way to do things differently. What we do in regular schools is keep doing the same thing, even if it doesn't work."

Barr is always talking about "the tribes." Union leaders and reformers, in his view, spend too much time fighting one another instead of finding common interests. Charter groups and unions agree on limiting central bureaucracy, giving teachers fewer students and more freedom, and concentrating funds in the classroom, but they mostly go at each other over tenure and the right to unionize. Ultimately, Barr's project isn't about fixing one broken school; he thinks he can resolve that impasse. His grander ambitions, as much as Green Dot's experience in Watts, are what brought him to Arne Duncan's office in March.

Duncan asked Barr what it would take to break up and remake thousands of large failing schools. "One, you have to reconstitute," Barr told him—that is, fire everyone and make them reapply or transfer elsewhere in the district. "Arne didn't seem to flinch at that," he said. "Second, if we can figure out a national union partnership, we can take away some of the opposition." Duncan asked Barr if he could persuade Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, to support the idea. "I'd love to do that," she told Barr, but she also expressed concerns. "She said, 'I can't be seen as coming in and firing all these teachers.' " So they talked about alternatives, like transferring teachers or using stimulus money for buyouts.

Cortines has also agreed in principle to a partnership in Los Angeles. "We'll find out very quickly what he thinks a partnership is," Barr said. "I think a partnership is Locke, period." Federal money, Barr noted, and an alliance with the national union "will force Mr. Duffy"—the U.T.L.A. president—"to come along." Green Dot could take over as many as five Los Angeles schools in 2010, and maybe more.

This month, Barr expects to meet again with Weingarten and her staff and outline plans for a Green Dot America, a national school-turnaround partnership between Green Dot and the A.F.T. Their first city would most likely be Washington, D.C. "If we're successful there, we'll get the attention of a lot of lawmakers," Barr said.



There are risks for Barr in this kind of expansion. It will be months, and maybe years, before there's hard evidence about what Green Dot has accomplished at Locke. And that one takeover put a real strain on the organization. "If they were to take over another high school in Los Angeles, they could handle that," Steve Seleznow, the deputy director of education for the Gates Foundation, said. "I'm not sure they have the capacity to do five at once." Then he paused. "I'm sure Steve has the *appetite* for it," he added, and laughed. Barr's impatience and his willingness to overextend himself are a bigger part of Green Dot's institutional culture than any theory of education.

In the meantime, Barr and his supporters continue to campaign. On a recent morning, outside 135th Street Elementary School, in Gardena, near Watts, a gregarious woman with a streak of gray through her black curls, wearing a Los Angeles Parents Union sweatshirt, passed a sheet of paper to a young Latino man in a Sears Appliance Repair jacket. He was accompanied by two little girls with matching Hannah Montana backpacks. "Would you like to sign a petition to transform Perry Middle School and Gardena High School?" she asked. She waved down a car that showed no sign of stopping, and bent over at the window when it did. "Do you have time to sign my petition to transform Perry Middle School and Gardena High School?" she asked. Immediately, the driver pulled over. Organizers are now in many neighborhoods, targeting elementary schools, telling parents that they have time to blow up and rebuild their middle schools and high schools before their kids enroll.

Everyone signed up. It's like that whenever she goes out. "People know something is wrong," she told me. "But they think it's their kids. Or it's their neighborhood. Or it's because they're poor. If we have to, we'll build a whole bunch of little charters around the school and take the students," the woman said, loud enough for half the block to hear. "We're going to get the change one way or another." ♦

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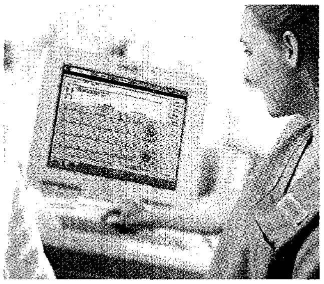
when it comes
to matters
of the heart,
men and
women differ.



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BRAIN GAMES

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BY JOHN COLAPINTO

One morning in January, a tall, gray-haired man whom I will call Arthur Jamieson arrived at the Mandler Hall psychology building, at the University of California, San Diego, in La Jolla. Jamieson is seventy years old and lives in the Midwest. He is a physician and an amateur cellist, and has been married for forty-seven years. He also suffers from a rare and bewildering condition called apotemnophilia, the compulsion to have a perfectly healthy limb amputated—in his case, the right leg, at mid-thigh. He had come to La Jolla not to be cured of his desire (like most people with the syndrome, he believed that relief would come only with the removal of the limb) but to gain insight into its cause. To that end, he had scheduled a meeting with Dr. Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, an Indian-born behavioral neurologist who is the director of the Center for Brain and Cognition at U.C.S.D., and has a reputation among his peers for being able to solve some of the most mystifying riddles of neuroscience.

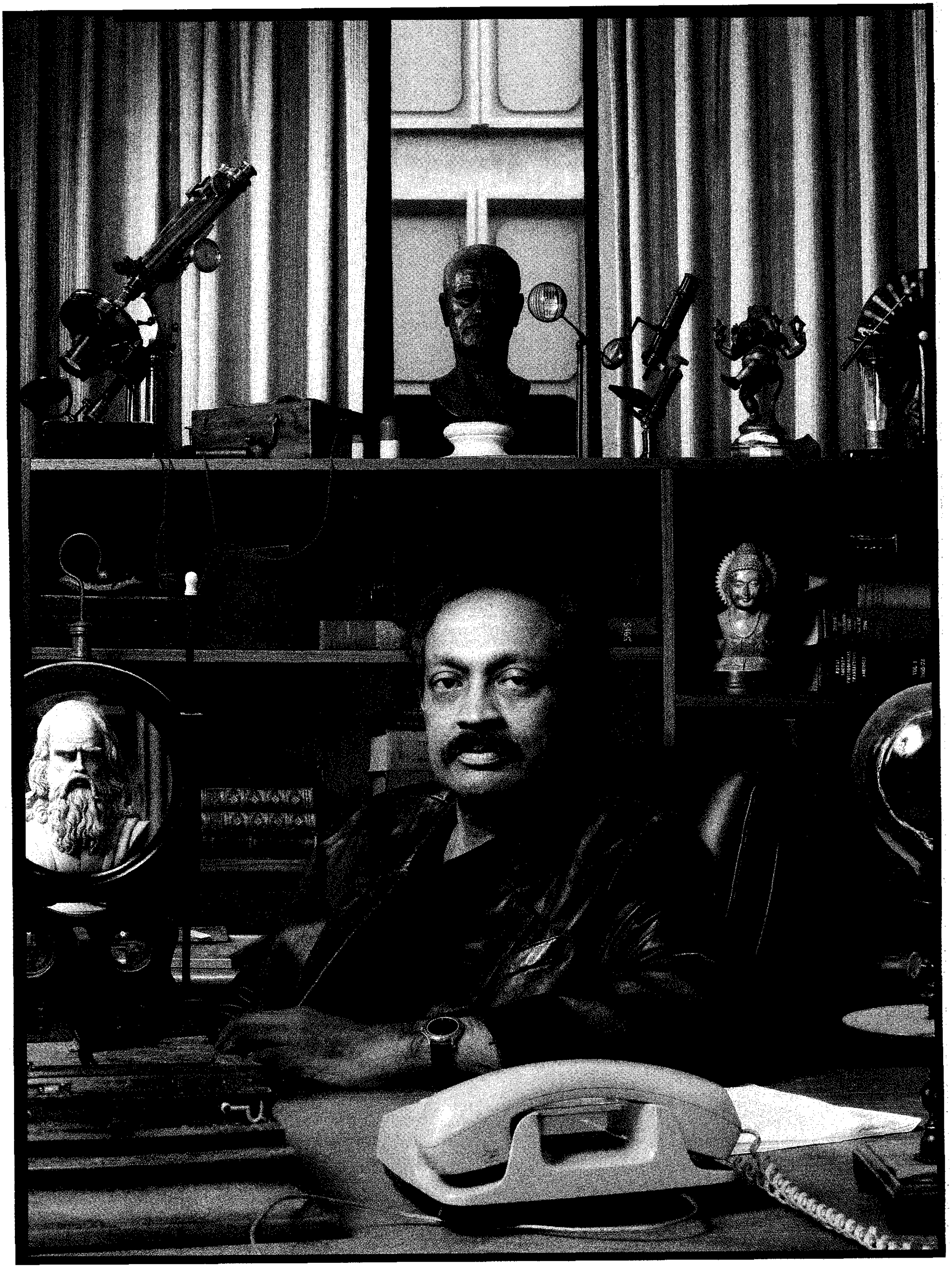
Ramachandran, who is fifty-seven, has held prestigious fellowships at All Souls College, in Oxford, and at the Royal Institution, in London. His 1998 book, "Phantoms in the Brain," about rare neurological disorders, was adapted as a miniseries on BBC television, and the Indian government recently accorded him the title Padma Bhushan, the country's third-highest civilian honor. But it is the awe that he inspires in his scientific colleagues that best illuminates his position in neuroscience, where the originality of his thinking and the simple elegance of his experiments give him a unique status. "Ramachandran is a latter-day Marco Polo, journeying the silk road of science to strange and exotic Cathays of the mind," Richard Dawkins once wrote. Eric Kandel, the Columbia University neuroscientist whose work on the physiological basis of learning and memory earned him a Nobel Prize in 2000, invoked two pioneering brain scientists to describe Ramachandran's contribution to the field: "He is a continuation of a tradition in neurology that goes back to the nineteenth century, to giants like Broca and Wernicke, who gave us, from studying clinical material, enormous insights into the functioning of the human mind."

Ramachandran, who has dark skin, curly black hair, and a mustache, cultivates a slightly rebellious image, often wearing dark polo shirts and a black leather jacket. However, when he meets with patients he tends to dress more conservatively. The day that he met with Jamieson, he was wearing a wool blazer and a tie. He greeted Jamieson in his office, whose décor reflects Ramachandran's many interests outside neurology: Darwinian evolution, plate tectonics, Indian art, Victorian medicine, paleontology, optical illusions. A four-foot stone sculpture of the god Shiva stood behind his desk. On one wall, there was a three-hundred-million-year-old fossil of a mesosaur, a freshwater reptile found only in South America and Africa (and which, as Ramachandran likes to explain, is a central piece of evidence in the theory of continental drift). On a side table was an array of antique scientific items: a brass Gilbert telescope, a hand-cranked electrical machine for curing "nervous diseases," a box of glass tubes containing Victorian homeopathic medicines. Another table held what appeared to be a smoothly sanded wooden sculpture of a woman's pelvis. Ramachandran often tells visitors that the object is a Henry Moore, before revealing, with a booming laugh, that it is actually a specimen of the world's largest seed, from the coco-de-mer palm.

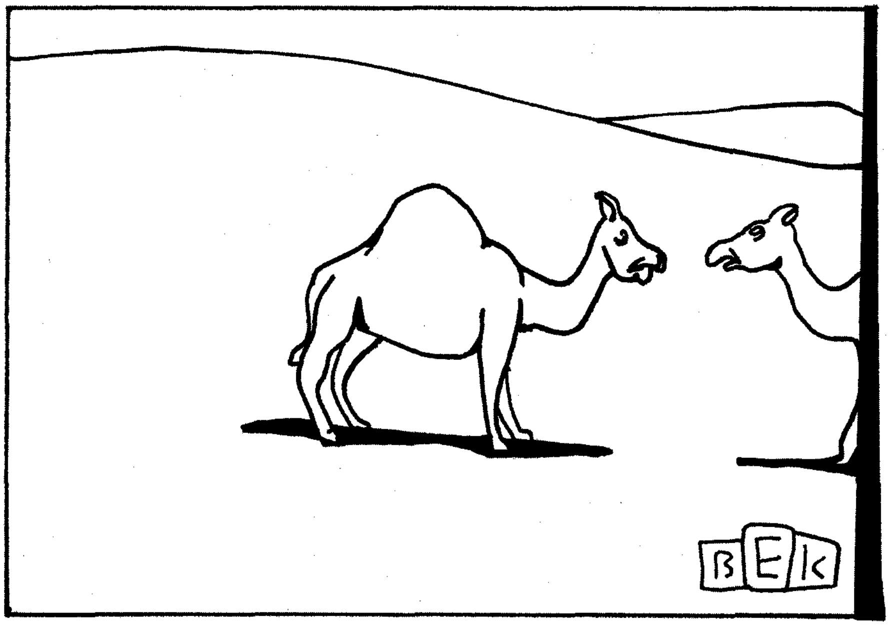
Ramachandran listened closely as Jamieson talked about his condition. In a specialty that today relies chiefly on the power of multimillion-dollar imaging machines to peer deep inside the brain, Ramachandran is known for his low-tech method, which often involves little more than interviews with patients and a few hands-on tests—an approach that he traces to his medical education in India, in the nineteen-seventies, when expensive diagnostic machines were scarce. "The lack of technology actually *forces* you to be ingenious," he told me. "You have to rely on your clinical acumen. You have to use your Sherlock Holmes-like deductive abilities to figure things out."

Ramachandran suspected that apotemnophilia was a neurological disorder and not, as Freudians have theorized, a psychological syndrome associated with repressed sexual desires. After interviewing several apotemnophiliacs—Jamieson is the fifth person with the disorder whom he has studied—Ramachandran was struck by the fact that all of them said they became aware of the compulsion in early childhood, that it centered on a particular limb (or limbs), that they could draw a line at the exact spot where they wanted the amputation to occur, and that they attached little or no erotic significance to the condition. Furthermore, none rejected the limb as "not belonging" to them, as some stroke victims do in the case of a paralyzed arm or leg, and as Ramachandran had predicted they might. Instead, they said that the limb *over*-belonged to them: it felt intrusive. "If you talk to independent apotemnophiliacs, they say the same bloody things," Ramachandran told me. " 'The line for cutting is here.' 'It started in early childhood.' 'It's over-present.' They're *not* crazy."

Jamieson, who was born and raised in New York City, first remembers having an unusual relationship with his right leg when, at around the age of seven, he was waiting for a bus. He found himself thinking that if he stuck out his leg it would be crushed and severed by the bus. "What came to me was not 'No, I don't want to do that' but 'How would I ever explain this?' " he told Ramachandran. In recounting his childhood memories, he said, "One of the things that's



Ramachandran favors a low-tech experimental method, which "forces you to be ingenious." Photograph by Dan Winters.



"You're not getting through the eye of a needle with that ass."

• •

astonishing to me is how clear these recollections are."

"These things are very salient," Ramachandran said in a resonant baritone, which carries a British-inflected Indian accent. "It's interesting to contrast these very clear-cut descriptions with these vague, Freudian notions about this whole phenomenon—that it's primarily connected with sexual stuff."

"Yeah," Jamieson said with disgust. "I've got no desire to cozy up to anyone with a stump. It's psychobabble."

Asked where he would make the cut line for the amputation, Jamieson unhesitatingly drew an index finger across the middle of his right thigh. As to whether he felt that his leg didn't "belong" to him, Jamieson was emphatic. "Somehow, for me, that just doesn't compute, that kind of language," he said. "I have always been fascinated by amputation and wished that I had one. Why? Who the hell knows?"

Ramachandran is one of a dozen or so scientists and doctors who, in the past thirty years, have revolutionized the field of neurology by overturning a paradigm that dates back more than a hundred years: that of the brain as an organ with discrete modules (for vision, touch, pain, language, memory, etc.) that are fixed early in life and immutable. Neurological syndromes, such as paralysis from stroke, forms of mental illness, and the perception of pain in an amputated limb (a phenomenon known as phantom-limb pain), were considered largely untreatable. But Ramachandran and other researchers have shown that the brain is what scientists call "plastic"—it can reorganize itself. Not only are different regions of the brain engaged in ongoing communication with one another, with the body, and with the surrounding world; these relationships can be manipulated in ways that can reverse damage or dysfunction previously believed to be permanent. Ramachandran's work with patients at U.C.S.D. has led to one of the most effective treatments for chronic phantom-limb pain and to a new therapy for paralysis resulting from a stroke. (In both instances, his treatment involves only a five-dollar household mirror.) It has also provided suggestive insights into the physiological cause of such mystifying syndromes as autism.

Until the mid-nineteen-nineties, Ramachandran's specialty was visual perception, but he had been interested in brain science since his days as a medical student in India. He made the switch to neurology in mid-career. "A scientist with that kind of creativity—it's rare," says Michael Merzenich, a neuroscientist at the University of California, San Francisco, whose experiments with monkeys in the nineteen-eighties provided much of the groundwork for understanding brain plasticity. "It's usually not allowed, in some sense. You're not supposed to be a butterfly like that."

Little about Ramachandran's scientific career has been conventional. He was born in Tamil Nadu, in southern India, to a Hindu family of the Brahman caste. His grandfather, Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyer, was the attorney-general of Madras and a framer of India's constitution. Ramachandran's father was a diplomat in the United Nations. However, science ran in the family. His mother had a master's degree in mathematics; one uncle was a professor of optics at the University of Sydney; another was an expert in theoretical physics and relativity.

At around the age of nine, Ramachandran began collecting fossils and seashells and became fascinated by taxonomy and evolution. He wrote to a conchologist at the American Museum of Natural History. "Here's this little kid from India sending him sketches of shells and asking, 'Are these new species?' " Ramachandran said. "And he is writing back saying, 'A, B, C, and D are well-known species; E is very rare and has not been reported from your locality and is very interesting.' So for a while I was the only conchologist in India!" Ramachandran continues to collect fossils and has gone on digs in South Dakota, where he has found specimens of trilobites and a thirty-million-year-old oreodon, a sheeplike creature. His most notable find, however, was not in the field but at the annual Tucson Gem and Mineral Show, in 2004, when he noticed on a table, amid heaps of bones and rocks, a skull that he thought could be a new species of ankylosaur, an herbivorous dinosaur from the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods. Ramachandran's friend Cliff Miles, a paleontologist, was with him and suggested that Ramachandran buy the fossil so that it could be studied and described. In January of this year, Miles and his brother Clark, also a paleontologist, announced the discovery of a new species of ankylosaur from the Upper Cretaceous period: *Minotaurasaurus ramachandrani.*

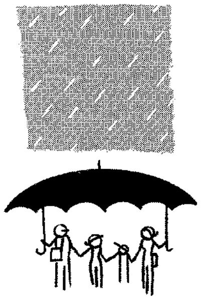
In his early teens, Ramachandran began conducting experiments in chemistry and biology in a makeshift laboratory under the staircase in the family's house in Bangkok, where his father was stationed. He also read books on the history of science and was struck by the role of intuition and play in many important discoveries: Galileo adapting a child's spyglass and discovering the moons of Jupiter, which led him to challenge the geocentric model of the universe; Faraday tinkering with a magnet and coil and discovering electromagnetism. Ramachandran often recounts these anecdotes to his students. "These stories are inspirational and fun," he told me. "But they're also telling you about how to do science."

Ramachandran's father discouraged him from pursuing a career as a researcher. "My father was intensely pragmatic," Ramachandran said. "He told me, 'Forget about chemistry and biology and all that. I know it's fun, but you're not going to make a living out of this.' " He urged his son to become a doctor, and Ramachandran duly enrolled at Stanley Medical College, in Madras. But he continued to read British and American science journals, and, in his second year, he devised an experiment that was inspired in part by conversations he had had as a child with his uncle the optics professor. The experiment addressed a question debated by experts since the time of Hermann von Helmholtz, in the late nineteenth century, about how the brain harmonizes the two slightly different images seen by each eye. For years, scientists believed that when the eyes are given conflicting information—for instance, a green image in front of one eye and a red one in front of the other—the brain accepts input from one retina at a time. Ramachandran, using an old-fashioned stereoscope and volunteers from his medical-school class, found that, when presented with a pattern that was colored differently for each eye, his test subjects continued to see in three dimensions. He concluded that a neural channel was still active in the "shut down" eye—even though his subjects were consciously seeing only one eye's color at a time. "This suggests that concepts of retinal rivalry need drastic revision," Ramachandran wrote in a report of the experiment.

He sent the report to *Nature* in December, 1971, a few months after his twentieth birthday. "To my astonishment, it was published without revision," Ramachandran told me. Soon, he published a more ambitious paper, "The Role of Contours in Stereopsis," which explored ideas about visual processing that became influential decades later. Ramachandran also wrote to one of the foremost vision scientists at the time, Dr. William Rushton, a professor of physiology at Trinity College, Cambridge, describing several original experiments that he was eager to try. The letter was passed to Oliver Braddick, a psychology lecturer who worked on vision. "The letter was obviously the product of a very fertile young mind," Braddick, who is now a professor of experimental psychology at Oxford, told me. "Perhaps a little kind of spinning off in all directions. But he had all these great ideas."

Braddick and another researcher, Fergus Campbell, invited Ramachandran to visit Cambridge for a month, at the university's expense, to conduct experiments. The results of one experiment, on which Braddick collaborated, were published as "Orientation-Specific Learning in Stereopsis," in the journal *Perception*. "Maybe fifteen years later, various people started publishing in this area of how specific developments of perceptual skills could be highly related," Braddick told me.

Ramachandran returned to Madras to complete his medical degree, and in the fall of 1974 he enrolled at Trinity College to begin a Ph.D. in visual perception. "I thought they'd all be like Faraday and the great Renaissance scientists," he said of the researchers he met in England. "Ninety per cent of them are like Indian scientists, or scientists here, for that matter, or anywhere—it's a nine-to-five job. They're not moved by the great romantic spirit of science, and they're not great Renaissance people. So I was a bit disillusioned. Then I ran into Richard Gregory soon after I arrived, and I said, 'Well, at least there's some of them here!' "



Gregory was a professor of neuropsychology at the University of Bristol, the author of several best-selling books about science, and an expert in visual perception who had a special interest in optical illusions. Typical of his approach was a demonstration involving a Charlie Chaplin mask on a rotating axle, in which he shows how the brain uses prior knowledge of shape, shading, and other light effects to make sense of visual information and assemble a coherent representation of the world. Gregory's playful style irritated some of his colleagues, but Ramachandran found it electrifying. "He came to Cambridge to give a lecture," Ramachandran recalls. "He was like a magician! He is truly one of the five most amazing men I have met in my life."

During his four years at Cambridge, Ramachandran commuted regularly to Bristol to design experiments with Gregory. They have since written a number of scientific papers together, including groundbreaking work on the blind spot, the region at the back of the eyeball where the retina's photoreceptors are interrupted by the optic nerve. This region creates a gap in our vision the size of a palm held at arm's length, but, owing to several strategies of the brain, we never perceive it. Using optical illusions to trick the eyes and the brain, Ramachandran and Gregory determined how the brain "fills in" the gap, and published influential articles on stroke victims suffering from scotoma—a particularly large blind spot sometimes caused by a focal lesion in the visual cortex.

In the mid-nineties, Gregory visited Ramachandran at U.C.S.D. to undertake further experiments on scotoma, but they were unable to find a patient with a focal lesion. Instead, they spent Gregory's weeklong visit investigating a phenomenon that had long fascinated Ramachandran: the reported ability of flounder to camouflage itself against patterned backgrounds. Leading ichthyologists disagreed about whether the fish changed its appearance or whether the camouflage effect was an illusion. Ramachandran's local pet store had no cold-water flounder, so he bought five peacock flounder, a related species that lives in tropical coral reefs. The men placed the fish on the bottom of four small tanks against various backgrounds: widely spaced polka dots, a neutral gray, and two checkerboard patterns. The fish, whose natural tendency is to lie flat on the sea bottom, precisely matched on their bodies the patterns at the bottom of the tanks—and they did so within two to eight seconds, far faster than the hours and, in some cases, days reported by researchers using cold-water flounder. Ramachandran and Gregory surmised that the rapid change was an adaptive mechanism, since the species lived among bright colors and patterns. The experiment, which they meticulously documented in photographs and on videotape, effectively ended the debate on flounder camouflage—and, incidentally, throws an instructive sidelight on visual processing in human beings. Even though the fish sees the background close up and in a distorted, slanted perspective, it re-creates the pattern on its body with perfect fidelity, as viewed from directly above. Human beings, Ramachandran points out, visually process the world in the same way. "Your eyeball distorts the image—it's curved," he says. "Your lens inverts it—it's upside down. And your two eyes double it. The brain *interprets* the image."

When they wrote up the results of the experiment, Ramachandran and Gregory laced their paper with puns. In a caption for a photograph showing one fish on a polka-dot background, they wrote, "Spot the flounder," and they said that they had conducted the experiments "just for the halibut."

"So we sent this off to *Nature*," Ramachandran told me, "and back come the referees' comments: 'Brilliant paper, publish it right away, but remove all the puns.' " He laughed. The paper, "Rapid Adaptive Camouflage in Tropical Flounders," was published in a 1996 issue of *Nature*. "Since then," Ramachandran said, "I get papers on octopuses and squids and fish—because they all think I'm an expert on ichthyology!"

In 1983, Ramachandran joined the psychology department at U.C.S.D., as an assistant professor working on visual perception. In 1991, he became interested in the work of Tim Pons, a neuroscientist at the National Institute of Mental Health, who had been investigating the ability of neurons in the sensory cortex to adapt to change.

The sensory cortex is in the deeply ridged tissue that makes up the outermost layer of the brain. Until recently, much of what was known about it was the result of the work of Wilder Penfield, a neurosurgeon in Montreal who, beginning in the nineteen-thirties, had conducted a series of extraordinary experiments while performing open-skull operations on cancer and epilepsy patients. Seeking to distinguish healthy tissue from diseased tissue, Penfield touched the surface of his patients' brains with an electric probe, and, because the brain lacks pain receptors, the patients were fully conscious and able to talk to him about what they felt. As he stimulated different areas of the brain, his patients reported feeling touch sensations in specific parts of their bodies. In this way, over several decades and hundreds of operations, Penfield mapped areas of the brain according to their corresponding body parts. The "Penfield homunculus," as it came to be called, is oriented upside down: the areas corresponding to the feet and the legs are at the top of the brain, the arms and the hands are in the middle, and the face is near the bottom. Body parts with the greatest sensitivity—lips, fingertips—take up a far larger area of the cortical surface than less sensitive areas.

The regions representing separate body parts on the Penfield homunculus, like the brain centers, were believed to be unchangeable. This view came under challenge as the technology for mapping the brain improved. Whereas Penfield had used a large electrode that affected thousands of neurons at a time, brain researchers in the fifties began to use tiny microelectrodes, which could be inserted into the brains of animals to record the firing of single neurons and, thus, communication among them. In the seventies, Michael Merzenich became expert at using microelectrodes to map the sensory cortex of monkeys. In one experiment, he mapped a monkey's hand area in the brain, then amputated its middle finger. Some months later, he remapped the monkey's hand and discovered that the brain map for the missing finger had vanished and been replaced by maps for the two adjacent fingers, which had spread to fill the gap. The results, published in the *Journal of Comparative Neurology* in 1984, were decisive proof that the brain can reorganize itself—at least across very short distances of one to two millimetres.

Pons, at N.I.M.H., was curious to know whether the brain could accomplish more dramatic reorganizations, across greater distances. He wondered what happened in the brains of monkeys that had lost brain input from an entire hand and arm, and he thought that he could procure some animals to test. In 1981, a member of PETA had infiltrated a Maryland lab where a researcher studying stroke paralysis had severed the sensory nerves in a group of macaque monkeys which connected the animals' arms to their spinal cords—a procedure known as deafferentation. PETA released photographs of the monkeys, and the animals were seized and placed in the custody of the National Institutes of Health. By 1990, the monkeys had grown old and were about to be euthanized. Pons suc-

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HACKERS CAN SIDEJACK COOKIES

A collage-homage to Guy L. Steele and Eric S. Raymond.

A beige toaster is a maggotbox.
A bit bucket is a data sink.
Farkled is a synonym for hosed.
Flamage is a weenie problem.

A berserker wizard gets no score for treasure.
In MUDs one acknowledges
a bonk with an oif.
(There's a cosmic bonk/oif balance.)

Ooblick is play sludge.
A buttonhook is a hunchback.
Logic bombs can get inside
back doors. There were published bang paths
ten hops long. Designs succumbing
to creeping featuritis
are banana problems.
("I know how to spell banana,

but I don't know when to stop.")
Before you reconfigure,

mount a scratch monkey.
A dogcow makes
a moof. An aliasing bug
can smash the stack.

Who wrote these tunes,
these runes you need
black art to parse?
Don't think it's only

genius (flaming), humor (dry),
a briefcase of cerebral dust.
A hat's a shark fin, and the tilde's dash
is swung: the daughter of the programmer
has got her period. It's all about wetware at last,

and wetware lives in meatspace.

—*Heather McHugh*

cessfully appealed to the N.I.H. to allow him to conduct a final experiment on four of them.

Pons anesthetized the first animal, opened its skull, and inserted electrodes into the brain-map area for the deafferented arm. He stroked the corresponding limb. As expected, the brain electrodes recorded no activity, since no messages were being sent to the brain from the arm. But when Pons stroked the monkey's face the neurons in the map of the deafferented arm began to fire. The experiment showed that the neurons in the face map had invaded the area of the hand-and-arm map, which had been inactive for twelve years. Fourteen millimetres of the monkey's arm map had been reorganized to process sensory input from the face. Pons repeated the experiment on three more monkeys, and published the results in *Science*, in 1991, as a paper titled "Massive Cortical Reorganization After Sensory Deafferentation in Adult Macaques."

Ramachandran read Pons's paper, and wondered whether it could help solve the long-standing medical puzzle of phantom limbs. Many amputees continue to experience sensations—often painful—from a missing limb, and the phenomenon has baffled scientists since it was first reported, in the sixteenth century, by the French surgeon Ambroise Paré. Ramachandran says that his interest in phantom limbs was a natural extension of his work in visual processing. "I was interested in the 'filling in' of the blind spot and other holes in the visual field; how the brain deals with undersampled regions—gaps," he said. "This resulted in my asking, 'How do you "fill in" a missing limb?' " Pons's monkeys seemed to offer a clue.

"Often, the best experiments begin as jokes," Ramachandran told me. "I joked with my students. I said, 'Hey, this means that if I touch the monkey's face the monkey should feel it in the hand.' And they all laughed, and I said, 'Hey, why not?' Then they said, 'Well, how do you train a monkey to tell you what it's feeling?' And I said, 'Why do you need a monkey? Let's try it on a person.' "

Ramachandran arranged to examine a seventeen-year-old boy whom he calls Tom, who had recently lost his left arm, just above the elbow, in a car crash. In a basement lab at Mandler Hall, Ramachandran lightly stroked Tom's cheek with a Q-tip. Tom said that he felt the touch in his cheek, but also in his phantom thumb. A touch on the lip he felt on his phantom index finger, a touch on the lower jaw in his phantom pinkie. Ramachandran realized that every time Tom moved his face and his lips—smiling, talking, frowning—the nerve impulses from his face activated the "hand" area in his cortex. "Stimulated by all these spurious signals," he later wrote, "Tom's brain literally hallucinates his arm."

Ramachandran immediately telephoned his wife, Diane Rogers-Ramachandran, and told her, "Come in right now. You've got to see this guy."

Rogers-Ramachandran is also a scientist, specializing in vision and experimental psychology. She and Ramachandran met in the late nineteen-seventies, at a vision conference in Florida. She was then a graduate student at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. They married in 1987. (They have two boys: Chandramani, who is nineteen, and Jaya, fourteen.) Rogers-Ramachandran rushed from their home in nearby Del Mar to watch the experiment. In the course of a few hours, she and her husband mapped Tom's phantom hand on his face. In a later experiment, they applied warm water to Tom's cheek. He felt heat in his phantom hand. When the water trickled down his cheek, he felt it running down his phantom arm. Ramachandran and his wife published their findings in 1992, in *Science*.

Rogers-Ramachandran, a vivacious woman with bright-blue eyes, continues to collaborate with her husband on papers, and they write a regular science column for *Scientific American Mind*. She says that it has sometimes been a challenge to be married to a man of Ramachandran's mental energy and intellectual curiosity. "Like, when we got married," she said one evening, over dinner at a restaurant with her husband and Jaya, "we went to England for our honeymoon, and spent the whole time going to bookstores and collecting prints, books, scientific instruments. Never went to a play! None of those things! The collecting! He went from scientific instruments to fossils, to learning about his Indian heritage, to art. You say, 'Well, can't we just go walk on the beach?' "

She mentioned Ramachandran's abstracted air—it's as if he were constantly mulling over an abstruse neurological conundrum. I knew something about this. On the first day of my visit to U.C.S.D., Ramachandran was unable to remember where in the parking lot he had left his car and finally had to activate the alarm on the remote control to locate it. His embarrassment suggested that this was the first time such a thing had happened. Yet, during the six days that I spent with him, it happened every time. When I told this story to Diane at dinner, she snorted.

"When we leave a place, he'll go into the parking lot, and a lot of time he'll just start walking," she said. "He has no idea where he's going. He just walks. One time, I picked him up from a trip—"

"Oh, don't tell him that," Ramachandran said.

But Diane went on. "He reached in his pocket and he said, 'Oh, my God, I had a rental car in that city! I completely forgot! I have the keys and I didn't turn the car in!' Another time," she continued, "I got a call from Sears and a woman said, 'There's a man here who says he's your husband and he's trying to purchase something on this credit card.' I said, 'Ye-e-e-s.' And she said, 'We're kind of concerned if it's really your husband, because he doesn't know your birth date.' I said, 'Oh, *that's* my husband!' "

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!" Ramachandran boomed. "That *is* a good story."

I could not resist asking whether Ramachandran had since learned Diane's birthday. They have been married for twenty-two years.

"I know she's a Leo," he said, slowly, eying her from across the table.

"I'm not a Leo," Diane said. "*You're* a Leo."

"No," he corrected himself. "Virgo! Virgo!"

"Yup," she said.

"August 18th," he said, with confidence.

"No," Diane said. Then she turned to me. "See, he gets the month, because it's the same as his."

"It's not the eighteenth?" Ramachandran asked.

"No."

"Twenty-second?" he offered.

"No."

At this point, Jaya asked, "Do you know *my* birthday?"

Ramachandran looked helplessly at his son and shrank into his seat. "It doesn't mean I don't love you," he said.

In 1994, Ramachandran published a paper in *Nature* that is now considered a landmark in the field of neuroplasticity. He described experiments that he had conducted with U.C.S.D.'s multi-million-dollar magnetoencephalography machine, which records the changing magnetic fields caused by brain activity. (Though he calls himself a "technophobe," Ramachandran occasionally uses high-tech gadgetry, chiefly as a means to support his hunches.) The high-resolution MEG scans clearly showed that in the brains of arm amputees the area associated with the face had invaded the area associated with the missing arm—"the first direct demonstration of massive reorganization of sensory maps in the adult human brain," Ramachandran wrote.

His most startling revelation about the brain's capacity for reorganizing itself was yet to come. It emerged from his efforts to address phantom-limb pain, which afflicts up to ninety per cent of amputees. Some report feeling that they are clenching their phantom fist so hard that their phantom fingernails are digging into their phantom palm. Phantom-limb pain can be so agonizing that some sufferers commit suicide.

For more than a century, doctors theorized that the pain was psychological or originated in the stump—in swollen nerve endings called neuromas. Some resorted to repeated amputations, making the stump shorter and shorter. When this didn't work, they tried severing the nerves at the spinal cord and even disabling parts of the thalamus, an organ at the base of the brain that processes pain. All to no avail. "They can chase the phantom farther and farther into the brain, but of course they'll never find it," Ramachandran once wrote. The phantoms, as he had shown, are *produced* in the sensory cortex, where neurons for the face have invaded territory once reserved for the arm.

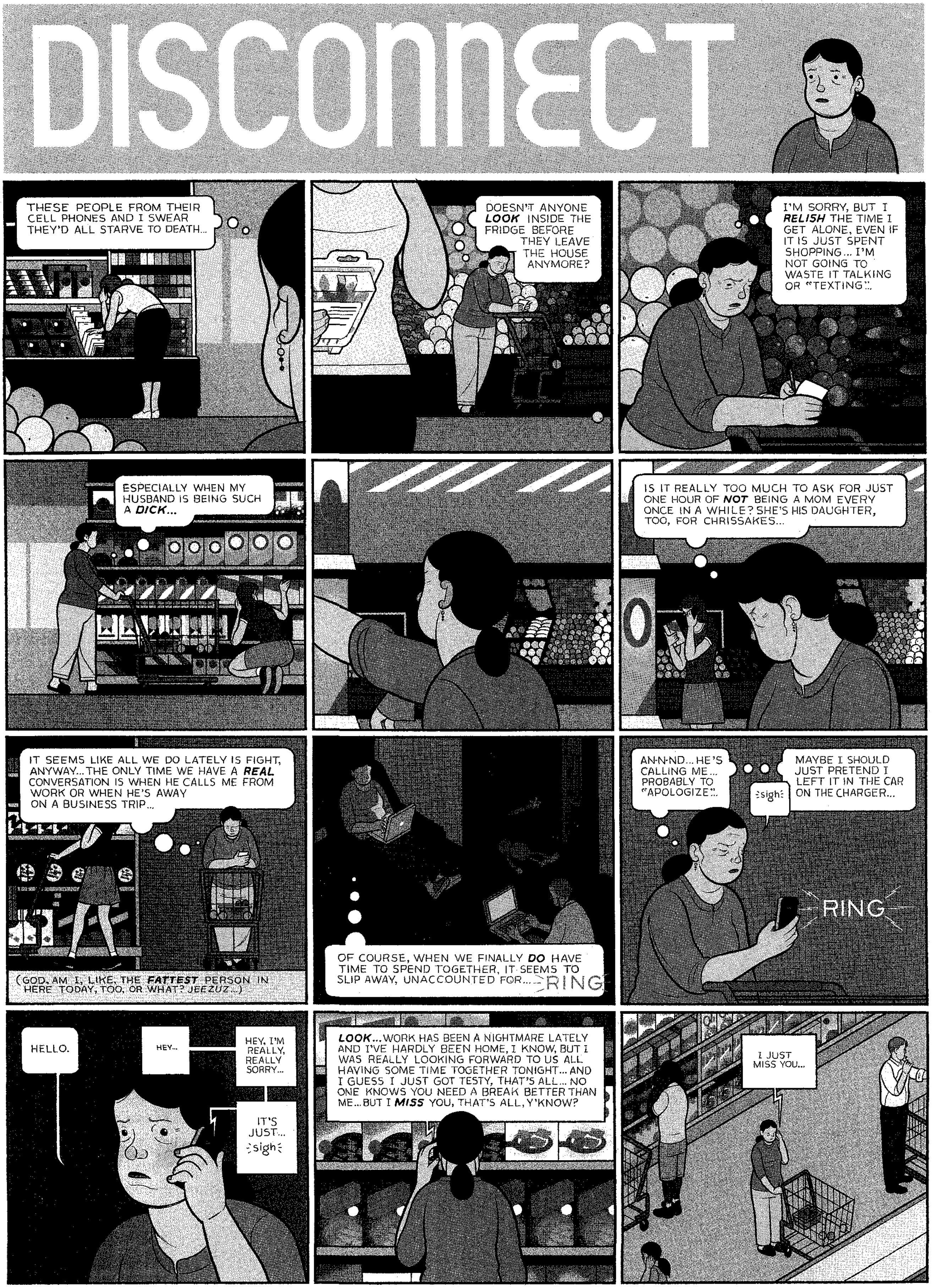
Ramachandran posited that the phantom sensations are also created by higher brain centers, produced by a complex interplay among the sensory cortex, the motor cortex in the frontal lobes, and a "body image" map in the right superior parietal lobule, a section of the cerebral cortex just above the right ear. One of the main tasks of the right superior parietal lobule is to assemble a coherent body image from touch signals ("I feel my fingers touch the cup"), visual signals ("I see my hand reaching for the cup"), and nerve signals from the muscles, joints, and tendons ("I feel my arm extending toward the cup"). Even though amputees no longer received these signals from the nonexistent limb, Ramachandran believed that memories of these inputs remained in the nervous system and the brain.

Reviewing the histories of amputees, Ramachandran noticed that many who suffered from cramping or clenching spasms had experienced, before their amputations, a period during which the limb was immobilized, sometimes for months, in a sling or a cast. He theorized that a kind of "learned paralysis" was burned into the brain's circuitry, as repeated commands from the patients' brains to move the limb were met with touch, visual, and nerve evidence that the limb could not move. When the limb was later amputated, the patient was stuck with a revised body-image map, which included a paralyzed phantom whose neural pathways retained a memory of pain signals that could not be shut off. Ramachandran wondered what would happen if such a patient was presented with evidence that the phantom could move ("I see my hand reaching for the cup"). If the brain could be tricked into thinking that the phantom was moving, would the cramping sensations cease?

His first test subject was a young man who a decade earlier had crashed his motorcycle and torn from his spinal column the nerves supplying his left arm. After keeping the useless arm in a sling for a year, the man had the arm amputated above the elbow. Ever since, he had felt unremitting cramping in the phantom limb, as though it were immobilized in an awkward position.

In his office in Mandler Hall, Ramachandran positioned a twenty-inch-by-twenty-inch drugstore mirror upright, and perpendicular to the man's body, and told him to place his intact right arm on one side of the mirror and his stump on the other. He told the man to arrange the mirror so that the reflection created the illusion that his intact arm was the continuation of the amputated one. Then Ramachandran asked the man to move his right and left arms simultaneously, in synchronous motions—like a conductor—while keeping his eyes on the reflection of his intact arm. "Oh, my God!" the man began to shout. "Oh, my God, Doctor, this is unbelievable." For the first time in ten years, the patient could feel his phantom limb "moving," and the cramping pain was instantly relieved. After the man had used the mirror therapy ten minutes a day for a

COMIC STRIP BY CHRIS WARE


DISCONNECT
THESE PEOPLE FROM THEIR CELL PHONES AND I SWEAR THEY'D ALL STARVE TO DEATH...
DOESN'T ANYONE LOOK INSIDE THE FRIDGE BEFORE THEY LEAVE THE HOUSE ANYMORE?
I'M SORRY, BUT I RELISH THE TIME I GET ALONE, EVEN IF IT IS JUST SPENT SHOPPING... I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE IT TALKING OR "TEXTING".
ESPECIALLY WHEN MY HUSBAND IS BEING SUCH A DICK...
IS IT REALLY TOO MUCH TO ASK FOR JUST ONE HOUR OF NOT BEING A MOM EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE? SHE'S HIS DAUGHTER, TOO, FOR CHRISSAKES...
IT SEEMS LIKE ALL WE DO LATELY IS FIGHT, ANYWAY... THE ONLY TIME WE HAVE A REAL CONVERSATION IS WHEN HE CALLS ME FROM WORK OR WHEN HE'S AWAY ON A BUSINESS TRIP...
(GOD. AM I, LIKE, THE FATTEST PERSON IN HERE TODAY, TOO, OR WHAT? JEEZUZ...)
OF COURSE, WHEN WE FINALLY DO HAVE TIME TO SPEND TOGETHER, IT SEEMS TO SLIP AWAY, UNACCOUNTED FOR...
RING
AN-N-ND... HE'S CALLING ME... PROBABLY TO "APOLOGIZE".
sigh
MAYBE I SHOULD JUST PRETEND I LEFT IT IN THE CAR ON THE CHARGER...
RING
HELLO.
HEY...
HEY, I'M REALLY, REALLY SORRY...
IT'S JUST... sigh
LOOK... WORK HAS BEEN A NIGHTMARE LATELY AND I'VE HARDLY BEEN HOME, I KNOW, BUT I WAS REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO US ALL HAVING SOME TIME TOGETHER TONIGHT... AND I GUESS I JUST GOT TESTY, THAT'S ALL... NO ONE KNOWS YOU NEED A BREAK BETTER THAN ME... BUT I MISS YOU, THAT'S ALL, Y'KNOW?
I JUST MISS YOU...

month, his phantom limb shrank—"the first example in medical history," Ramachandran later wrote, "of a successful 'amputation' of a phantom limb."

Ramachandran conducted the experiment on eight other amputees and published the results in *Nature*, in 1995. In all but one patient, phantom hands that had been balled into painful fists opened, and phantom arms that had stiffened into agonizing contortions straightened. "People always ask, 'How did you think of the mirror?' " Ramachandran told me. "And I say, 'I don't know!' There was a mirror in the lab, so that must have been in my mind, and I said, 'Let's try it.' It's not any more mysterious than if you say something 'popped into' your mind."

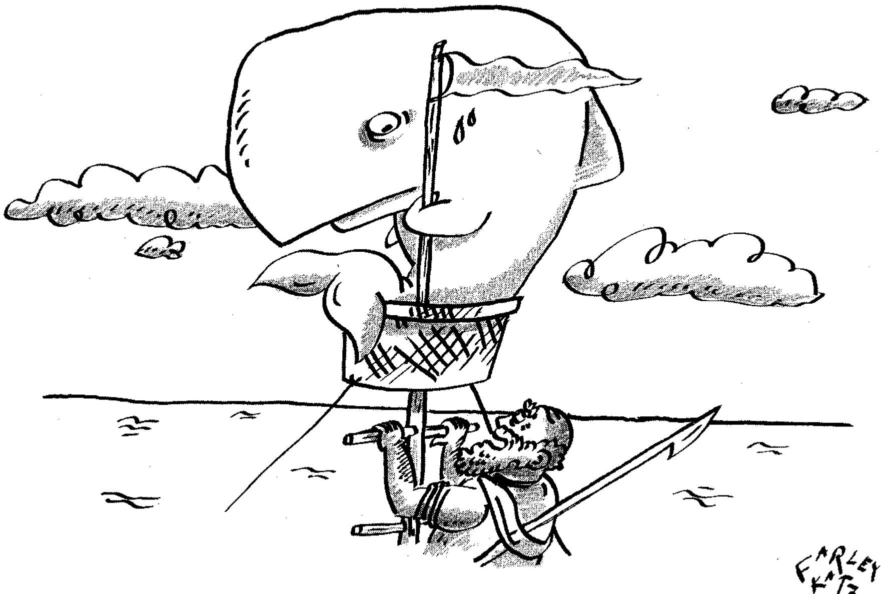
Dr. Jack Tsao, a neurologist for the U.S. Navy, was doing graduate work in physiology at Oxford University when he read Ramachandran's *Nature* paper on mirror therapy for phantom-limb pain. "I said, 'Why the heck should this work? It doesn't make sense,' " Tsao told me. Several years later, in 2004, Tsao began working at Walter Reed Military Hospital, where he saw hundreds of soldiers with amputations returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Ninety per cent of them had phantom-limb pain, and Tsao, noting that the painkillers routinely prescribed for the condition were ineffective, suggested mirror therapy. "We had a lot of skepticism from the people at the hospital, my colleagues as well as the amputee subjects themselves," Tsao said. But in a clinical trial of eighteen service-members with lower-limb amputations, in which six were given mirror therapy and the twelve others were evenly divided between two control therapies (a covered mirror and mental visualization), the six who used the mirror reported that their pain decreased (and, in some cases, disappeared altogether). In the two control groups, only three patients reported pain relief, and others found that their pain increased. Tsao published his results in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, in 2007. "The people who really got completely pain-free remain so, two years later," said Tsao, who is currently conducting a study involving mirror therapy on upper-limb amputees at Walter Reed.

Buoyed by these successes, in the mid-nineties Ramachandran abandoned his work in visual perception to devote himself to neurology. "Vision was getting overcrowded," he told me. Neurology seemed like virgin territory. Much of the specialty was concerned with describing strange syndromes, rather than with explaining their cause or alleviating symptoms. "You've got a hundred papers saying, 'My God, they can move their phantom'—but it stayed at that level, a descriptive level," Ramachandran said. "We said, 'Look, we can do experiments. What if you do *this* to the patient?' And I took that same style to other syndromes. Then the sky was the limit. No one was studying these things."

Gradually, Ramachandran began to specialize in rare conditions and disorders, including the Capgras delusion, in which an otherwise lucid victim of a head injury insists that close loved ones (spouses, parents, children) are impostors. Freudians had theorized that Capgras patients were suffering from unbearable Oedipal desires aroused by the blow to the head, but Ramachandran demonstrated that severed neural pathways between the facial-recognition areas of the visual cortex and the emotional centers of the brain were responsible for the disorder. He also investigated post-stroke syndromes, in which patients deny that a paralyzed limb has become immobile or, in a more severe version, insist that the paralyzed arm or leg belongs to someone else. Ramachandran traced the delusion to damage in the right superior parietal lobule, the body-map region, where the discrepancy between the absence of signals from the limb to the brain and the presence of the limb on the body results in a defensive rationalization that the arm or leg must be someone else's. A few years ago, Ramachandran began studying apotemnophilia, the compulsion to amputate a healthy limb. He is, he said, "ninety-five per cent sure" that he has figured out the cause of the disorder. His consultation with Arthur Jamieson strengthened this conviction.

After interviewing Jamieson in his office, Ramachandran led him to a lab for a Galvanic Skin Response, or GSR, test, which would reveal how Jamieson's legs reacted to a mild pain stimulus. He escorted Jamieson into a small room that held only a table, a desktop computer, and two chairs. He asked Jamieson to sit with his back to the computer. Then David Brang, one of Ramachandran's graduate students, attached a sensor to the middle two fingers of Jamieson's right hand using a Velcro strap. The sensor would measure the reaction of Jamieson's sympathetic nervous system by monitoring the sweat on his fingers. With a sterilized pin, Brang pricked Jamieson's legs at random points, waiting a few seconds between each prick. A scrolling graph on the computer screen registered Jamieson's responses.

The unaffected leg—the left one—and the right leg above where he wished to have it amputated showed a normal response: the graph at first shot upward with each prick, but with further pricks it ceased to rise, then began to flatten out, indicating that Jamieson's nervous system



"Always the last place you look."

was getting used to the stimulus. But when Brang pricked Jamieson anywhere on the leg *below* the amputation line, his nervous system responded with increasing distress, the graph climbing higher and higher with each prick.

The experiment seemed to support Ramachandran's theory about the disorder. He believed that people with apotemnophilia had a deficit in the right superior parietal lobule, where the body-image map is assembled. According to this notion, Jamieson was missing the neurons in the map that corresponded to his right leg from the mid-thigh down. He had normal sensation in the unwanted part of his leg—he felt the pin prick. But when the pain signal travelled to the right superior parietal lobule there was nothing in the body-image map to receive it.

"So there's a big discrepancy—a *clash*—and the brain doesn't like discrepancies," Ramachandran said. "When a discrepancy comes in, it says, 'Shit! What the hell is going on here?,' and it kicks in and sends a message to the insular part of the brain, which is involved in emotional reactions—so you're getting this crazy GSR." In apotemnophilia sufferers, the discrepancy causes a feeling of distress that is no less agonizing for being below the level of conscious awareness.

In the past two years, Ramachandran has tested four other apotemnophiliacs using MEG brain scans. "You touch them anywhere in the body and the right superior parietal lobule lights up, as you would expect," Ramachandran said. "But if you touch him here"—he gestured to a point on Jamieson's leg below the amputation line—"nothing happens." Ramachandran said that the experiment needed to be repeated by other researchers, but, he added, "This takes a spooky psychological phenomenon and, as Shakespeare said, gives it a 'habitation and a name.'" Furthermore, the findings suggested to Ramachandran a possible method for alleviating the oppressive sensations in the unwanted limb.

Later, he asked Jamieson to stand in a corner of his office and placed a three-foot-high mirror in front of him, in such a way that in place of his right leg Jamieson saw his left, which he held bent at the knee. Jamieson gazed into the mirror. "Astonishing," he said. For a moment, the leg looked "right."

The mirror was a less risky kind of sham amputation than the method that Jamieson had recently adopted: injecting anesthetic to block the sciatic nerve of his right leg, shutting down the touch sensation. (As a physician, Jamieson had learned how to perform the nerve block.) The anesthetic provided up to five hours of relief, Jamieson said. Apotemnophiliacs, like transsexuals, anorexics, and others with body-image disorders, often do not seek a "cure" for their condition, and Ramachandran spoke gingerly when he suggested that using both the mirror and the drug could potentially yield powerful results. "It's conceivable—nobody knows—but if you do this repeatedly, and I'm not suggesting that you try this, because I know you don't want to be 'changed,' but if you do it repeatedly, both the injections and the visual amputation, it might actually eliminate this desire," he said.

Ramachandran describes his approach to science as "opportunistic": "You come across something strange—what Thomas Kuhn, the famous historian and philosopher of science, called 'anomalies.' Something seems weird, doesn't fit the big picture of science—people just ignore it, doesn't make any sense. They say, 'The patient is crazy.' A lot of what I've done is to rescue these phenomena from oblivion." Ramachandran is conscious of the fact that this focus might lead some to think that he works on the margins of his field. "Now, you could say that about Oliver," he told me, referring to his friend and colleague Oliver Sacks, the neurologist and author of "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat." "'Oh, he studies spooky things,'" Ramachandran went on. "That's bullshit. This man has deep insight into the human condition. He's a poet of neurology." Ramachandran says that his own interest in oddities is not for their own sake but for what they can tell us about the normal brain, including, he said, "very enigmatic aspects of the brain that few people have dared to approach, like what is a metaphor? How do you construct a body image? Things of that nature."

In 1999, Ramachandran turned his attention to synesthesia, an intermingling of the senses that causes some people to see each letter of the alphabet in a particular color. Others identify musical notes with colors; still others mix touch sensations with strong emotions, so that sandpaper might evoke disgust, velvet envy, wood grain guilt. Vladimir Nabokov described his letter-color synesthesia in "Speak, Memory": "I see *q* as browner than *k*, while *s* is not the light blue of *c*, but a curious mixture of azure and mother-of-pearl." As an artist, Nabokov was, according to Ramachandran's research, eight times more likely to have synesthesia than someone who is not an artist; the fact that Nabokov's mother also had the condition suggested a genetic component. (The phenomenon runs in families.)

The most common synesthesia is number-color. Ramachandran believed it was not coincidental that the fusiform gyrus, where number shapes are processed in the brain, lies next to the area where colors are processed. He suspected that a cross-wiring in the brain, similar to that in phantom-limb patients, was responsible. Brain scans confirmed his hunch: in synesthetes, there are excess neural connections between the two brain centers. This suggested to Ramachandran that the syndrome arises from a defect in the gene responsible for pruning away the neural fibres that connect the various centers of the brain as it develops early in life. "What do artists, poets, and novelists have in common?" Ramachandran asked me. "The propensity to link seemingly unrelated things. It's called metaphor. So what I'm arguing is, if the same gene, instead of being expressed only in the fusiform gyrus, is expressed diffusely through the brain, you've got a greater propensity to link seemingly unrelated brain areas in concepts and ideas. So it's a very phrenological view of creativity."

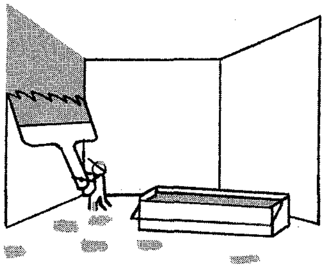
In the mid-nineties, Ramachandran read a paper by Italian researchers who had discovered that a set of neurons in the frontal lobes of monkeys fired not only when the monkeys reached for an object but also when they observed another monkey performing the same action. Ramachandran wondered if these so-called "mirror neurons" also exist in humans—a difficult thing to test, since the Italians had inserted electrodes into the brains of living monkeys, a technique that it is impossible to use on people. But Ramachandran knew of experiments from the nineteen-fifties in which non-invasive EEG scans were used. These had shown that deliberate movements in humans suppress a kind of brain activity in the motor cortex called mu waves. Ramachandran and a postdoctoral fellow, Eric Altschuler, ran EEGs on volunteers as they observed another person performing an action such as opening and closing a hand. The tests showed that merely witnessing an action in others caused mu-wave suppression in the watcher—evidence that mirror neurons exist in humans, too. Other researchers have since confirmed that people have several systems of mirror neurons, which perform different functions.

"So let's take the broader theoretical implications of this," Ramachandran said one afternoon, while we were visiting the San Diego Rehabilitation Institute at Alvarado Hospital, where he had examined a paralyzed stroke patient suffering from limb denial. He was sitting in the hospital cafeteria with the clinic's medical director, Lance Stone. "These mirror-neuron experiments are showing that, through and through, the brain is a dynamic system not only interacting with your skin receptors, up here"—he pointed at his own head—"but with *Lance!*" He pointed across the cafeteria table at Dr. Stone. "Your brain is hooked up to Lance's brain! The only thing separating you from Lance and me is your bloody skin, right? So much for Eastern philosophy." He laughed, but he wasn't kidding. Ramachandran has dubbed mirror neurons "Gandhi neurons"—"because," he said, "they're dissolving the barrier between you and me."

Ramachandran wondered whether mirror neurons were implicated in autism, a condition whose primary characteristic is severe social impairment, including an inability to imitate and a lack of empathy. Ramachandran, Altschuler, and Jaime Pineda, a U.C.S.D. colleague, ran EEGs on autistic children. They got normal mu-wave suppression when the subjects moved their own hands. But when the children watched another person move his hand, their brains didn't respond. At a neuroscience conference in 2000, Ramachandran and his co-authors presented their findings and speculated that autism was caused by a deficit in the mirror-neuron system. The idea initially met with resistance from autism researchers, some of whom argue that the disorder is caused primarily by deficits in the cerebellum. Unlike his earlier foray into ichthyology, Ramachandran was entering a sphere of science fraught with politics. "The trouble is, it's a minefield," he told me. "The parents are involved. There's big money involved. Suppose you invested your life in saying that the cerebellum is what's going on, then someone comes along and spends one year on it and says, 'It's the mirror-neuron system'?"

In the past nine years, however, mirror neurons have become a central topic in autism research. Almost at the same time as Ramachandran, a group in Scotland had also suggested the link. Among those who have provided further evidence are researchers at the Helsinki University of Technology, who used MEG scans to show mirror-neuron deficits in autistic teen-agers and adults. Lindsay Oberman, a former graduate student of Ramachandran's, who now works as a postdoctoral fellow at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, at Harvard University, has begun using a technology called transcranial magnetic stimulation—a technique that triggers targeted areas of neurons in the brain—to influence brain plasticity in autistics. "So far, we have done some amazing things," Oberman has written. "We have found evidence that we can improve the functioning of the mirror-neuron system and some communication skills following repeated application of TMS."

On the last day of my visit with Ramachandran, I attended the lab discussion that he holds, each Monday, with his postdoctoral and graduate students at the Center for Brain and Cognition Laboratory, on the second floor of Mandler Hall. The lab, a room of modest size, was dominated by a long central table heaped with the strange tools of Ramachandran's trade: a foam-rubber hand of the type you buy at a horror shop (for a demonstration that Ramachandran likes to do to show visitors how the brain projects touch sensations onto objects that are not part of the body); a mirror ball of the type that M. C. Escher liked to draw; a boxed set of the BBC miniseries of Sherlock Holmes (for inspiration); several plastic minimizing lenses (Ramachandran has found that viewing a painful arm or leg through a lens that makes the limb look smaller dramatically reduces pain); a reflective metal tube that could be twisted into various amoebic shapes (when I asked if this puzzle had "experimental significance," Ramachandran said, "No," then quickly corrected himself: "Well, it's fun"); a series of oddly shaped metal boxes outfitted with slanting mirrors (for inducing perceptual distortions in those who peer through the eyeholes); and a plaster cast of *Minotaurasaurus ramachandrani*, a creature that resembles a medieval gargoyle, with three nasal openings on either side of its ridged and crenellated head. Ramachandran has asked one of his postdocs, Paul McGeoch, to perform a CAT scan of the skull in order to learn about the creature's olfactory lobes, and, in this way, to test Ramachandran's theory that his ankylosaur's heightened sense of smell might allow the beast to sniff out mates or carrion from a great distance (although it was more likely a vegetarian).



Seated around the table were members of Ramachandran's research group. Most were in their middle to late twenties, except for a man in his eighties with a British accent: John Smythies, whom Ramachandran introduced to me as the person who launched the drug revolution in the sixties. Smythies demurred, explaining that as a postdoc at Cambridge in the fifties, while performing psychopharmacology experiments involving mescaline, he had merely introduced Aldous Huxley to a colleague, who then administered to Huxley the hallucinogens that led him to write "The Doors of Perception," which later became a bible of the Woodstock generation.

Ramachandran, who was dressed in his usual black leather jacket and dark polo shirt, took a seat at the table and fielded questions from his students, helping them to refine their methodologies and using the brisk interchanges to hone ideas for research. At one point, Lisa Williams, a Ph.D. student who specializes in schizophrenia—a disorder that Ramachandran first began exploring about a decade ago—mentioned, in passing, the difficulty that schizophrenics have in differentiating between phenomena that are internally and externally generated.

"Oh!" Ramachandran cut in. "Speaking of that, I have an idea—I'm sure it's been done—but you know that when people think to themselves you get unconscious movements of the vocal cords? Now, has anybody done that with schizophrenia to see if it's enhanced?"

"I don't know," Williams said. "I'll look that up."

If such enhanced subvocalization occurs when schizophrenics think, that would support Ramachandran's view of the brain as an organ in dynamic equilibrium—and of mental illnesses as resulting from a neurological disruption that destroys that equilibrium. In the case of schizophrenia, whose sufferers often complain of "hearing voices," Ramachandran suspected damage or deficit in a sensory mechanism in the vocal cords which, when normal people think, sends a signal to the brain indicating "This is simply a thought; no one is actually saying this." If this mechanism was damaged, the subconscious movement of the vocal cords could be interpreted as an outside voice speaking in one's head.

"By the way," Ramachandran continued, "I have a theory that if you take people with carcinoma of the larynx, and you remove the vocal cords, and they think to themselves, they may actually start hallucinating. A prediction."

This remark prompted Laura Case, a first-year graduate student who has focussed on autism, to speak. "That could be interesting in autism, too," Case said. "Because if they lack the robust mirror activation for actions, which they do—"

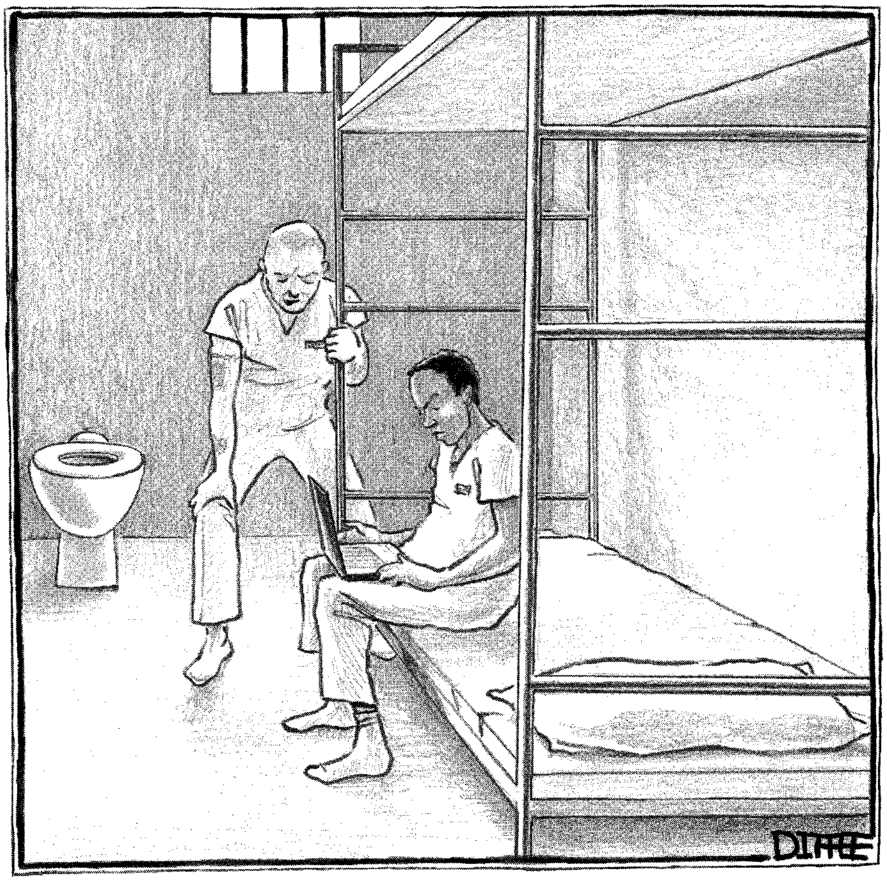
Ramachandran interjected, "Then they confuse—so they may confuse their own vocalizations with somebody else's! And people have linked autism to schizophrenia. The old theory was that it was early-childhood schizophrenia! Was that a coincidence?"

The discussion proceeded in this freewheeling manner for more than an hour, with Ramachandran seizing on notions that seemed to offer fruitful possibilities for further investigation and tactfully deflecting those which he thought were dead ends. When the discussion ended, at 6 P.M., and Ramachandran's students had departed, I asked him if he thought that his work was aimed at constructing a "grand unified theory" of the brain. He said that neuroscience was still too young a discipline for such an ambition. Nevertheless, in recent years he has increasingly focussed on the biggest mystery of the brain: consciousness. Mirror neurons play a role, he thinks. "One of the theories we put forward," he said, as he packed up his bag, "is that the mirror-neuron system is used for modelling someone else's behavior, putting yourself in another person's shoes, looking at the world from another person's point of view. This is called an allocentric view of the world, as opposed to the egocentric view. So I made the suggestion that at some point in evolution this system turned back and allowed you to create an allocentric view of yourself. This is, I claim, the dawn of self-awareness."

Still, Ramachandran said, deciphering how consciousness works will take a supreme creative leap. "It may require a radical revision of the way in which you perceive the universe, the world, the brain," he said, as he stepped into the hallway and locked the lab door behind him. "Just like Einstein had to change your complete perspective in order to really understand time, saying it's part of the whole space-time manifold. Things don't 'pass through' time—that's a human illusion. But, if it requires that, some genius is going to have to come along and solve it." He opened the door to the stairwell and started down. "What we're hoping," he went on, "is that we can grope our way toward the answer, finding little bits and pieces, little clues, toward understanding what consciousness is. We've just scratched the surface of the problem. When I say 'we,' not just our lab but the entire world of neuroscience."

By now, we had reached the ground floor of Mandler Hall and were walking outside, past clusters of students. Ramachandran was still speaking excitedly—he had veered into a knotty digression about the brain's role in the evolution of language—when he glanced up and realized that we had reached the parking lot. He stopped talking and looked out over the sea of automobiles.

"Uh-oh," he said. ♦



"What happens if you hit Escape?"

A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE LONG SHOT

Can China's archly political auteur please the censors and himself—and still find a mass audience?

BY EVAN OSNOS

Just after dawn on a frigid plateau in northern China, the director Jia Zhangke was having trouble with a scene involving a fire-breather. The fireballs were coming out of the man's mouth a foot too low, and were obscuring other faces in the shot. This was Jia's inaugural effort at fashion photography. Twelve years after he débuted, with "Xiao Wu," his award-winning student feature about a pickpocket, Jia had been hired by the Chinese edition of *Esquire* to shoot a spread called "Beijing Spring." It was to be a fantastical homage to his aesthetic, with characters inspired by his films mingled among curiosities. The magazine had brought Jia and his crew back to the coal country of Shanxi Province, where he grew up and shot his first films.

After the third unsatisfying take, Jia jogged out from behind the camera and, with a gloved hand, traced an imaginary target high above the head of an actress dressed as a clown. The fire-breather, who was on loan from a local theatre troupe, nodded and took another swig of kerosene.

At thirty-nine, Jia is five feet four and slight. Enveloped in an olive-green parka and black scarf, he walked around the set with his hands plunged deep into his pants pockets, giving him the bearing of a kid skipping school. He was composing the day's first scene in the shadows beneath a highway overpass, with gangly models positioned among circus characters. The models shivered in parkas and Ugg boots until the final seconds before each shot, when they shed their coats and squeezed their feet into stilettos. Forty-eight hours earlier, Jia had been under palm trees at a gala hosted by the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. "We ate a meal, picked up our awards, and got back on the plane," he told me. He received awards for Best Foreign-Language Film and for Best Cinematography for "Still Life," his drama about the social and physical demolition wrought by China's Three Gorges Dam. ("Still Life" had also received the top prize at the Venice International Film Festival in 2006, and prompted Manohla Dargis, of the *Times*, to declare Jia "among the most strikingly gifted filmmakers working today whom you have probably never heard of.")

Jia's latest feature, "24 City," an unusual blend of documentary and fiction which tells the story of a factory closing, was set to première in a month in nearly a hundred theatres across China, one of his largest releases yet. The movie had screened at Cannes nearly a year earlier, but since then Jia had been negotiating with Chinese censors about how much he would be forced to cut in order to release it in China. (About two minutes, it turned out, including a scene of workers singing a desultory rendition of the "Internationale.") In a few weeks, he would release his first book, "Jia Xiang" ("Jia Thinks"), a collection of essays and interviews, followed two weeks later by a second book, a compilation of interviews he has conducted with laborers. Before the end of the year, he is scheduled to begin shooting two new films, and next spring he is slated to be in New York, where the Museum of Modern Art is preparing a full retrospective of his work, the first in more than twenty years that it has devoted to a mainland-Chinese filmmaker, and a remarkable milestone for someone his age. His calendar is booked through 2013.

On the political spectrum of Chinese filmmakers, Jia is difficult to place. Neither a dissident nor an entertainer, he makes films that are archly political but sufficiently oblique to obtain theatrical release. The Chinese government is particularly sensitive this year, because it is the twentieth anniversary of the crackdown on demonstrators at Tiananmen Square. Jia's *Esquire* spread was designed to look like the nineteen-eighties. When I asked, "What's with all the fire?" he broke into a mischievous grin and said, "The eighties had a few fires."

Once more, the models shed their coats, and behind them a crew member touched a lighter to an abandoned car drenched in gasoline, and it erupted in flames. The air reeked of hair spray and motor oil. Jia spun around to hustle out of the shot before the flames died down. "Camera! O.K., ready! Go!" It was splendidly bizarre.

Jia would not have had much use for pyrotechnics a few years ago, when he was known for a near-evangelical fidelity to realism. Once, in a student film, he had featured a wordless seven-minute sequence of a man walking on a Beijing street, in order to subject the audience to what he called "a staring test." His films are so subdued—nonviolent and virtually sexless, filled with long shots, long takes, and restrained dialogue—that when the actress Zhao Tao showed her family "Platform," her first movie, her parents fell asleep. Yet when Martin Scorsese happened upon a tape of "Xiao Wu," a decade ago, he experienced what he described to me as "a visceral reaction," explaining, "The real test of a film is when I look at it—not knowing where it came from, not knowing anything about it—and suddenly you want to make movies again. I think this is really what happened." Scorsese went on, "It was just so moving, so moving, and so rigorously made."

Jia works best at night. On set, he has been known to shoot until dawn. He lives by himself in a two-bedroom apartment in central Beijing, but he is rarely at home. (His seven-year marriage to Zhu Jiong, a professor at the Beijing Film Academy, ended in 2006, though she has continued to work as a producer on his films.) He spends most of his time at his studio, in a drab apartment compound near the Beijing Film Academy, where he once studied. The studio has several low-ceilinged offices branching off a main room furnished with Ikea-style desks and chairs. It carries the hint of a boiler-room operation that could be dismantled in a hurry, and seems well-suited to his belief that, even after living in Beijing nearly half his life,

Jia Zhangke's films explore the lives of people trapped on the margins of China's boom. Photograph by Andrew Rowat.

he is an interloper. Shanxi Province is "my true China," he says. "My focus, my concern, my emotional world is there. Beijing is the city where I work and plan films."

Jia's relations with the government are tepid. He coöperates with China's state-run studios for distribution but not for financial backing. He relies on private investors in China, Japan, Hong Kong, and Europe. He also makes an average of ten commercials a year, for Olay, China Mobile, and others.

Jia is not much interested in plot. His attraction to film seems to owe more to the dictum of André Bazin, the French theorist whom he counts as an inspiration, that photography "embalms time." Jia crams his movies with so many hair styles, pop songs, and news references that they feel like time capsules of the here and now. He has a single, unwavering theme: the liminal space in which individuals try, usually in vain, to move from one life to another—floating migrants, laid-off factory hands, restless teen-agers, all trapped on the margins of China's boom, with enough technology to glimpse the wider world but no way to reach it. In Jia's cosmology, trains usually speed out of sight before you can catch them and motorcycles break down. His characters are often inspired by people he grew up with—friends, in his words, "as ignorant and coarse and full of vitality as roadside weeds." (Before I visited Jia in Shanxi, my only previous trip to the province had been to write about a nearby city that had been ranked as China's most polluted place. When I asked why the apples on the trees there were covered in plastic bags, a farmer explained that it was to keep them from being stained by the air.)

Late in the afternoon of the *Esquire* shoot, Jia and company had moved to a gymnasium, where a few dozen college students were costumed in Mao suits and eighties-style double-breasted jackets. Somewhere in the crowd Jia spotted a pair of modern sneakers, and he stalked over. "Who else is wearing the wrong shoes?" he demanded. "You are all university students! You are capable of checking yourselves!"

He glanced at his watch. They were behind schedule and would be skipping dinner. He had been exacting all day, doing so many takes that, at one point, one of the models grumbled to another, "I've never seen someone take pictures so slowly."

Watching from the side was Zhao Hai, an old friend of Jia's from middle school who does odd jobs around the set when Jia is back in town. At Fenyang Middle School, they had been among the founding members of a school poetry society they called the Raspy Division, after the new sound of rock and roll.

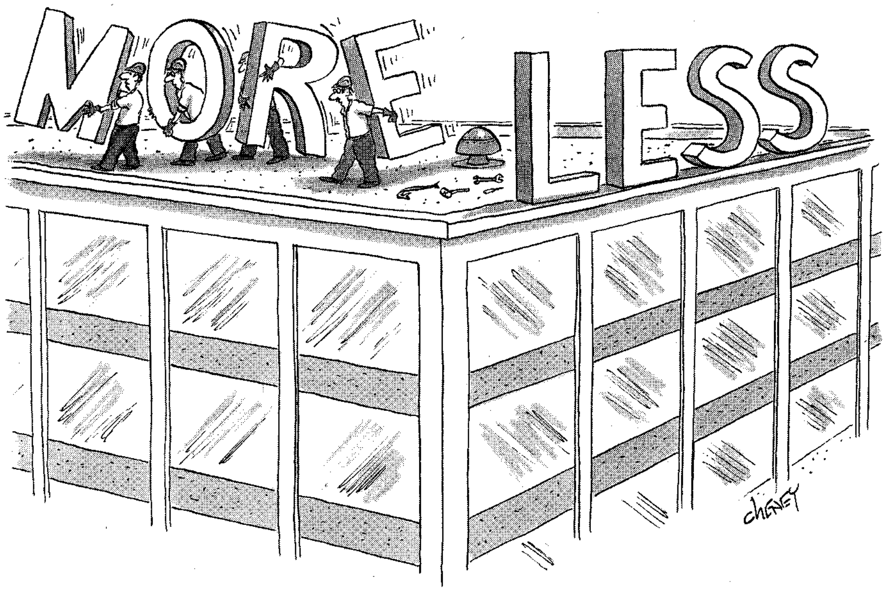
"Frankly, Dolores, I'm tired of being your piñata."

"Of the seven of us, he was the best. He had natural ability," Zhao said. They had published their work in pamphlets cranked out in batches of a hundred on a mimeograph. The poems were hardly subversive stuff—matters of the heart were a recurring theme—but in the stifling confines of their school, Zhao said, they were "a sensation at the time. We were sort of celebrities on campus."

Unlike Jia, Zhao never left Shanxi. He works as a graphic designer today and looks older than his years, with white streaks in his hair and a weary expression on his face. "We were all quite talented, but he had persistence," Zhao said. "For a kid from a small town to become a film director? That's a distant dream."

Jia was barely old enough to walk when his mother nicknamed him Lailai—the little scoundrel. Compared with his sister Zhang Hong—a well-behaved violinist, six years older—Jia was a precocious connoisseur of the street. "Life had so little content, so little entertainment," he says, that "fighting became entertainment. I would go to the bus station near my home, where fights happened every day. You just waited there, and something was guaranteed to happen. Somebody's head would get busted, and then I would follow them to the hospital to watch them get bandaged. That's how bored we were." He became obsessed with escaping Fenyang. When he was old enough to ride a bike, he cycled ten miles just to catch a glimpse of a passing train, which looked to him like a symbol of "the faraway world, the future, hope." He did not see an ocean until he was twenty-six.

His family, though not impoverished, was underfed. They relied so much on cheap sweet potatoes one winter that he still can't stomach them. Jia's mother, Zhang Ruiying, worked the counter at a state-run distributor of sugar, cigarettes, and liquor—the rare luxuries of village life. Jia's father, Jia Liankai, the son of a surgeon, had not been allowed to go to college, because he was classified as a "landlord"; he cultivated a quiet, anonymous life as a local schoolteacher. Even so, Jia Liankai could not escape politics. Once, the school was ordered to meet a quota of identifying three "rightists" among its teachers. "The principal found a way to decide who was a rightist: all the



teachers were told to stand on a platform in the playground, shoving each other. The first three who fell to the ground were the 'rightists,'" Jia Zhangke said. "When my father told me this story, many years later, I could still see the fear in his eyes." Jia's father wrote poems, which Jia didn't read until years later. Every one of them, he discovered, was an ode to a political movement, as if his father had assumed that someone would inevitably try to use them against him.

As a teen-ager, in the eighties, Jia revelled in China's sudden influx of new pop culture. He rode the bus for four hours to buy a cassette of Teresa Teng, the empress of Taiwanese love ballads. It felt gloriously subversive, and he eventually sought to capture, in his films, the transformative power of music and imagery. "Before that, the songs we sang were 'We Are the Heirs of Communism' and 'We Workers Have Power.' It was always 'we.' But in Teresa Teng's song, 'The Moon Represents My Heart,' it was about 'me.' So, of course, we loved it!"

His favorite movie was "Breakin'" (1984), a breathtakingly campy break-dancing drama inspired by "West Side Story." "I watched it seven or eight times. I taught myself the moves," he said, and he put his skills to use one summer with an itinerant song-and-dance troupe. He graduated from high school the same spring as the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, known in China as the events of June Fourth. The protests were distant, and clouded in official condemnations, but the movement made a searing impression on him. "Although it failed, it didn't really fail," he said, "because it took freedom and democracy, individualism, individual rights, all these concepts, and disseminated them to many people, including me."

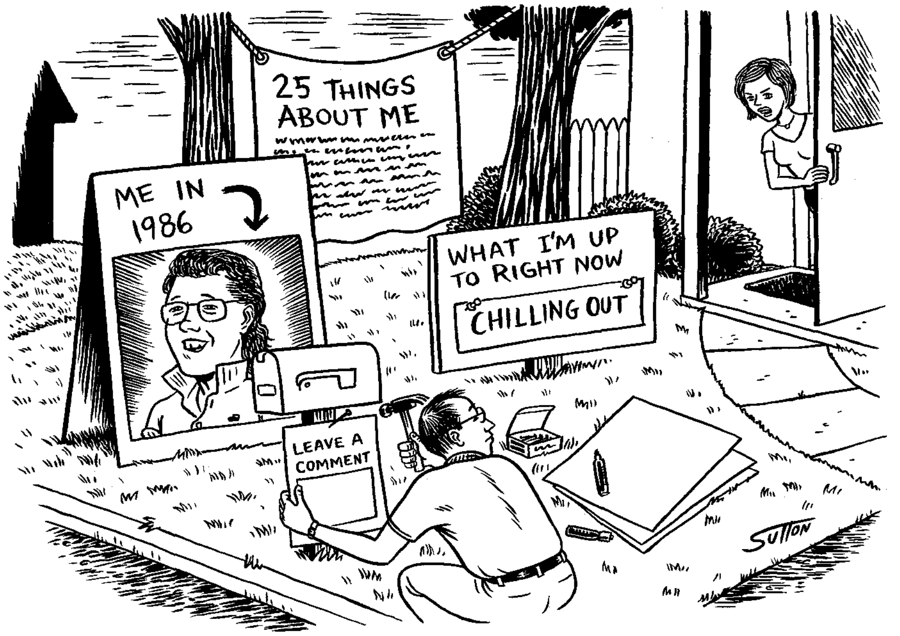
Two years later, while studying oil painting in Taiyuan, Jia saw the film "Yellow Earth," by Chen Kaige, which was set on China's northern plains, close to where Jia grew up. For the first time, he imagined that film could be a way to render the world he knew, and he applied to the Beijing Film Academy. He was rejected—twice. It didn't help that he knew virtually nothing about film. "In the whole city of Taiyuan, I could find only two books on film," he said. On his third try, Jia gave up on the directing track and shouldered his way into the academy through the back door, as an auditor in the less competitive theory program. When he arrived, in 1993, he was older than most of his classmates. To Jia, "they were all children" and he felt out of place. His country roots set him further apart from privileged urban students, who used the word "farmer" to tease one another. Jia moonlighted as a TV ghostwriter, but once went unpaid after writing a twenty-part drama, and the experience left him with "a profound suspicion of people." On his balcony at home, he still keeps the set of cheap porcelain cups that he received as compensation for the script.

Jia had arrived at film school admiring the films of Chen Kaige, whose "Farewell My Concubine" (1993) had recently won the Palme d'Or at Cannes, but after watching some more high-profile period dramas he grew disenchanted with their allegories and their distance from contemporary life. The Chinese film industry was so uninspiring that audiences had largely abandoned the cinema. Lin Xudong, a documentary editor who later became one of Jia's artistic advisers, recalled that one day he'd bought a ticket for a new film, but, after he'd taken his seat, the clerk told him it would not be screened. "Only one ticket had been sold," he said. "If I wanted to watch the movie, I would need three people in the audience."

Jia immersed himself in films from Taiwan and Europe, often watching three a day. Those which he could not find in the school archives he found on the street, as pirated V.H.S. tapes. He often pedalled his bicycle across town to watch screenings at a French cultural center in Beijing. He revered Hou Hsiao-Hsien, the Taiwanese master whose long takes and wide-angle shots eventually shaped Jia's style. He admired Vittorio De Sica and Michelangelo Antonioni, but none of those influences affected Jia as deeply as Robert Bresson, whose use of nonprofessional actors Jia first encountered in "A Man Escaped" (1956). "Bresson took plot, photography, and performance, and one by one he negated them, leaving only the purity of the film," Jia has said. "It was the first time that I ever felt the charm of time itself, and understood a kind of transcendent amusement with the spirit of film."

One night, Jia and some friends were walking home from another dreary studio picture when Jia said, "Let's make a movie—the kind of movie we want to make." As his friend Gu Zheng later recalled, in an essay that lends the night some cinematic drama, one of them smashed a beer bottle, and it sounded, to Gu, like "our manifesto." They named themselves the Beijing Film Academy Youth Experimental Film Group.

Jia wrote a script called "Xiao Shan Going Home," about a cook trying to get to Henan for Chinese New Year, and he cast his classmate Wang Hongwei in the lead. It was an improbable choice—a professor had recently pronounced Wang to be the worst actor in the class—but Jia liked Wang's low-key approach, and he rounded out the cast with other nonprofessionals, including one guy who had to be persuaded over a bottle of Erguotou,



"Why can't you use Facebook, like everybody else?"

China's cheap grain alcohol. When they screened the film, classmates were unimpressed. They said it was crudely edited, and they disapproved of Jia's use of regional dialects instead of standard Mandarin. (At the time, Chinese films and television were required to use standard Mandarin.) When Jia tried to screen it at Beijing Normal University, he was told that the film had "anti-social tendencies." But a film journalist urged Jia to enter his film in the Hong Kong Independent Short Film & Video Awards. As a mainlander, Jia had had trouble meeting the eligibility requirements, and had to play up the role of a Hong Kong citizen who was part of the production in order to enter. The film took first place.

In Hong Kong to pick up his award, Jia met the winner of the festival's documentary-filmmaking prize: Yu Likwai, a taciturn young man from a farming family from the outskirts of Hong Kong, who became Jia's cinematographer. Like Jia, Yu's path to film had been one of escape. "The train for me was a very magical machine: it took me to the city to see movies, to buy records," Yu told me. He had gone to film school in Belgium, where he immersed himself in silent films and in the austerity and emotional detachment of European cinema. As a gift, Yu gave Jia a book on Bresson. Most important, Yu thought, they shared an approach to the business of making movies. "We are not dreamers. We are more pragmatic than other independent directors or producers," he said, adding, "We want our movies to have visibility."

They headed to Shanxi to make a film, and when they reached Jia's home town, Fenyang, Jia was overwhelmed by the changes that were unfolding. "Many of my old classmates were married with kids but now getting divorced, or they were clashing with their parents. Traditional values were crumbling. Money was at the center of everything," he said. A classmate-turned-cop told Jia about a childhood friend, the man they called Donkey, who had ended up as a petty thief. Inspired, Jia wrote "Xiao Wu," about a pickpocket—a subject his idol Bresson had also dealt with.

The crew slept ten to a room in a local hostel. The set had few lights and no video monitors to show what the cameraman was filming. If that wasn't hard enough, Jia encouraged his nonprofessional actors to veer off the script if it felt stilted, and they were so often out of position or improvising that Yu and Jia began to use long takes partly to accommodate them. As a rebuke to the polished audio tracks of other Chinese films, Jia told the sound engineer to leave in as much authentic random sound as possible—car horns, loudspeakers, pop music. The engineer finally quit, claiming that the film would tarnish her reputation.

When "Xiao Wu" was screened in Beijing, professors at the film academy were uninterested. But other intellectuals regarded it as groundbreaking. In contrast to the epic historical Chinese dramas that were popular at the time, Jia had revealed a bitterly unadorned image of contemporary life and its discontents. To older Chinese admirers especially, the film's honesty was bittersweet. "We had been forbidden from telling the truth for such a long time that once we were allowed to do so, we did not know how to tell the truth," the painter Chen Danqing wrote of the film. It won awards at festivals in Berlin, Pusan, San Francisco, Vancouver, and elsewhere, but China's censors—the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television—were readying their response. On January 13, 1999, Chinese authorities banned Jia from making films. His name was placed on a blacklist that was circulated to equipment shops. No one would rent him a camera, and no processor would develop his film. He was twenty-nine.

As a student, Jia had met Zhu Jiong, a cinematography student who was two years younger, and in 1999 they married. When he offered to pay for a ring, she told him to make a film instead. Despite being banned, he continued to work, renting equipment on the sly and shooting as far from Beijing as possible, often telling onlookers that he was making a commercial. If he were discovered, authorities could fine him, confiscate his footage, or revoke his passport. But soon he was at work on an ambitious project—"Platform," the chronicle of a local song-and-dance troupe and its first forays outside its home town. Jia took the title from the first pop song he had ever heard as a teen-ager, and the script drew heavily on his own experiences in Fenyang.

While scouting for an actress who could speak the local dialect, Jia visited a dance class at the Taiyuan Teachers College, where he noticed a tough-minded instructor, Zhao Tao, who came from a steel-mill family. She saw him staring. "I was thinking, What's up with this guy?" she told me. Jia introduced himself and Zhao agreed to try acting, though she had been sufficiently spooked by casting-couch stories that she arrived on set with a stun gun. She eventually became his muse, and acted in five more of his feature films.

"Platform," which begins in 1979, as the Cultural Revolution is giving way to reform, opens on a village audience crowded around a stage for a performance of a Communist musical about Mao's birthplace, "A Train Travelling Toward Shaoshan." (It included melodies that Jia's sister had performed on her violin growing up.) In the opening scene, the young members of the Peasant Culture Group from Fenyang pantomime a whistling, chugging train moving across the stage, but after the show their boss berates troupe member Cui Mingliang (portrayed by Jia's former classmate Wang) for his feeble attempt at engine noises. Cui concedes, "I don't know how trains sound."

The film follows Cui and others for a decade, as they traverse not only the Chinese countryside but also eons of cultural and political transformation. When Cui wears his first pair of bell-bottoms, his father, a laborer, demands to see if he can squat in them. "I'm an art worker! No manual labor," Cui protests.

"Platform" conveys an unglamorous view of China's lurch into the free market. At one point, an illiterate coal miner is asked to sign a contract that reads:

> Life and death are questions of fate. I'm willing to work in Gao's mine. Management accepts no blame for accidents. . . .

"Platform" ends in 1989, at the dawn of another new era; the cultural work team, now privatized and renamed the All-Star Rock n' Breakdance Electronic Band, is doomed, soon to be replaced by televisions as entertainment in the villages.

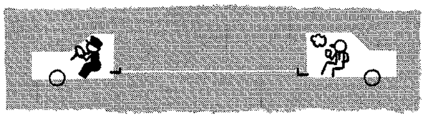
When he finished shooting "Platform," Jia confronted the problem of how to edit the film in secret. "We dared not process the film in China, because all the laboratories were owned by the government," Chow Keung, the associate producer, who has served as executive producer of many Jia films, recalled. Chow saw no choice but to pack up the footage and smuggle it through customs at the walk-over border with Hong Kong. Chow was terrified. "Sometimes I had to hand-carry it," he said.

"Platform" premièred at the Venice film festival, and went on to win more than half a dozen major prizes around the globe. Writing in *Film Comment*, Kent Jones compared Jia's mastery of his moment in time to Godard's in the sixties and Altman's in the seventies. Jia was a full-blown film-festival celebrity. He dedicated the film to his father, and returned to Shanxi to screen it for him. As they watched together, his father's unease was palpable. "He said, 'I envy you, because you can write about yourself,'" Jia told me. "But he also worried about me."

Despite his success abroad, Jia was increasingly dispirited. He was working at a furious pace: he followed "Platform" with "In Public," his first documentary, a sublime short—shot in a train station, a dance hall, and other locales—and "Unknown Pleasures," a feature about restless, disillusioned youths in a rust-belt town. But in China his films could be found only on pirated disks or at small screenings in bars. He felt powerless. "My motivation for making films was not simply a love of movies but also a sense of idealism, a hope that I could help to change society." He had come to see Chinese directors as "carnies," as he put it—knife-jugglers with little to show for their risks—and he considered abandoning cinema. On a trip to New York, he visited Martin Scorsese at his office and said he might quit making movies. "I said, 'You can't do that!'" Scorsese recalled. "'You're going to have to go on. You're going to have to really push through.'"

For a year, Jia shot nothing. He returned to Shanxi and spent weeks with old friends. They still called him Lailai, and harangued him for not having children yet. It was restorative, and, over time, Jia's conception of his place at the intersection of culture and politics began evolving as well. "I realized that the power of a single individual is truly limited, but culture itself is powerful," he said. "You discover that there are people in journalism, literature, painting, all trying to do the same thing."

By 2003, film authorities were eager for reconciliation. Though officially barred, Jia and other young directors were still working and racking up film-festival acclaim. Moreover, the government's conception of film had changed. "They used to treat film as a propaganda tool. Now they saw it as an industry," Jia said. "To make money, they had to deregulate." The film bureau called a meeting with banned directors and offered a deal: the ban would be lifted if they would agree not to show movies they had made illegally and, in the future, would submit to a streamlined script-approval and censorship process. (To this day, the filmmakers submit a fifteen-hundred-word synopsis rather than a full script, but the final edit of a film requires approval before it can be distributed.) The new regulations offered far less than full autonomy, but Jia felt vindicated. "If I had quit the film industry on January 13, 1999, and every other director had as well, the system would never have changed."



For his first legal film, "The World," Jia departed from Shanxi to tell the story of workers in a real-life Beijing theme park, where tourists could climb a miniature Eiffel Tower or be photographed in front of an ersatz World Trade Center. In an aesthetic break, he laced the film with a series of lushly colored animated sequences intended to convey the sheer strangeness of the place. It was Jia's biggest production yet, with a budget of more than a million dollars, but though it was a critical success in the United States and elsewhere, Jia was disappointed by the muted impact at home. He flew west to the Three Gorges Dam, the mammoth hydroelectric project spanning the Yangtze, to make a documentary about the contemporary artist Liu Xiaodong, who was painting scenes of local workers. But, as Jia shot the documentary, which was later entitled "Dong," the sight of two-thousand-year-old towns being demolished inspired a feature as well—"Still Life"—which Jia wrote over three days, holed up in his hotel. He cast his cousin, Han Sanming, as a coal miner in search of an estranged wife. To appear in the film, Han took a break from his real job, as a coal miner in Fenyang; after shooting, he returned to the mine.

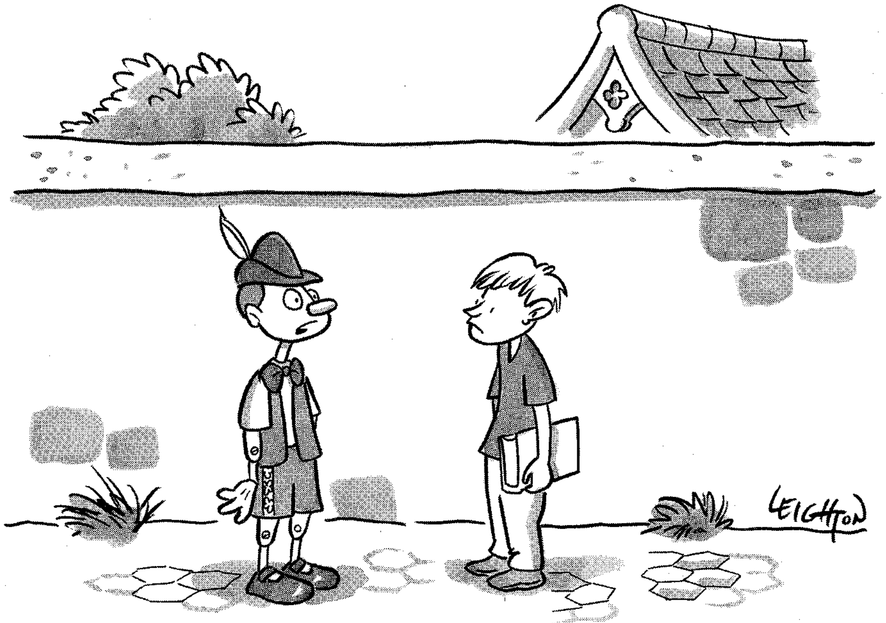
Jia began to grow frustrated with the limitations imposed by realism. He had come to believe that China's transformations were so fast and mind-bending that putting them on film virtually demanded surrealism. In "Still Life," a building launches into the air like a rocket, and a flying saucer zips across the sky. (As Jia has explained to a film magazine, China's "official speeches and pictures are like U.F.O.s that never touch the ground.") At their best, the effects make the distinction between real and unreal irrelevant: the final shot of "Still Life"—a lone figure silhouetted against the sky, balancing on a tightrope between buildings, an image that often strikes me as a fitting metaphor for Jia himself—looks scarcely stranger than anything before it.

The production was draining. When Zhao Tao, who was playing the role of a nurse searching for her gallivanting husband, was not giving the subdued performance that Jia wanted, he secretly told the crew to ignore her or do whatever they could to make her miserable. She nearly quit the production before Jia let her in on the ruse. ("That was evil," he said later, then added, "It worked.") The budget had called for two or three trips to the gorges, but Jia was unhappy with his attempts to capture the scale of the transformation, and he insisted on making six trips. Costs mounted. A French investor pulled out. "We were nearly bankrupt," Chow, the producer, said. They raised more money, but while racing to finish the film in time for the Venice festival, Jia received a call from his sister: their father had been given a diagnosis of late-stage lung cancer. Jia stayed at the hospital for weeks. When his father died, in March of 2006, Jia's dominant emotion was guilt, for having invested so much more energy in his films than in his family. "When he died, it was like I suddenly grew up," Jia said.

His absorption in his work was also dooming his marriage. Jia and Zhu Jiong were seldom in the same city. They parted amicably. Jia still blames himself: "I was not responsible enough to her. She was too lonely."

That September, "Still Life" took the top prize in Venice, making Jia only the second mainland-Chinese director to win it, after Zhang Yimou, the director of "Ju Dou" (1990) and "Raise the Red Lantern" (1991). But as Jia prepared to release "Still Life" in China, his frustration with the film establishment—and with Zhang Yimou in particular—boiled over. Jia accused China's older filmmakers of churning out big-budget action pictures that neglected the country's mounting social problems. "When faced with the complexity of real society, their hands and feet quiver, and they deliriously shoot a bunch of childish fairy tales," Jia wrote in an essay. He blamed a blockbuster mentality for preventing films like his from reaching a wider audience. To emphasize the point, he premièred "Still Life" on the same day that Zhang unveiled "Curse of the Golden Flower," a forty-five-million-dollar palace drama that was said to be China's priciest production to date. "In this era of worshipping gold, who is still interested in good people?" Jia said to reporters. In response, Zhang's producer was quoted as saying that Jia was "sick with revenge against the rich."

"Still Life" did poorly in Chinese theatres, just as Jia expected. Two years later, he remains embittered, and is especially critical of Zhang Yimou's coziness with the Chinese government. (In 2002, Zhang premièred his martial-arts film "Hero" at the Great Hall of the People, the home of the Party-run legislature, and he designed the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.) "Since 'Hero,' I have not liked his films," Jia told me one night as we sat in the lobby of a multiplex, between screenings. "Not because they are kung-fu movies—I like kung-fu movies—but because the film underscores power, that we should 'bow down' before power! For 'harmony in the world,' we should give up individual fights and efforts. The 'authority of power,' the focus of his films, is what makes me extremely uncomfortable."



"I'll be a real boy as soon as I'm done with the hormone treatments."

Jia's argument has many supporters, both foreign and domestic, and, indeed, the reputations of his predecessors have eroded sharply in recent years. But, at the same time, Jia has encountered criticism of his own from the avant-garde edge of Chinese intellectuals, who accuse him of abandoning his most subversive themes. On a Saturday afternoon in February, a few days before the Chinese première of his most recent film, "24 City," a screening was held for writers, filmmakers, and other invitees. "24 City" is composed mainly of interviews, some real and some performed by actors, to tell the true story of Factory No. 420, an engine plant in the city of Chengdu that had employed thirty thousand workers and was shut down to make way for a high-rise luxury building complex. After the screening, Jia joined a panel discussion at a loft-style gallery, a few floors up from the Beijing branch of Hooters. The audience of a hundred or so was Chinese, hip, and earnest (I counted two berets)—exactly the kind of fans who gravitated to him when he was underground.

After the host gave a routine round of praise, the first question from the audience asked Jia, pointedly, "Was the decision to use movie stars made with the market in mind?" Another questioner asked if Jia had avoided harder-hitting stories of truly abject poverty because he wouldn't get them approved. In an armchair onstage, Jia pursed his lips and looked wounded. "If this group is marginalized," he said, "then their faces, their language, their food, their living conditions, their homes, their expressions—all of that—is erased from the screen, to zero. Anything I can do to hold on to them and make people see them onscreen is the most important thing I can do! Otherwise, they're silenced!"

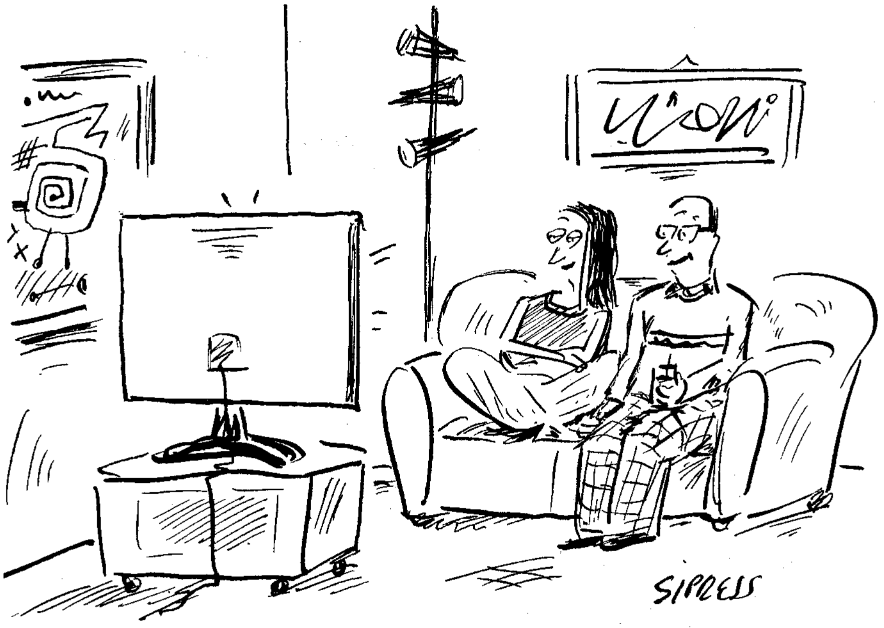
When I asked Zhang Xianmin, a well-known independent filmmaker who teaches at Beijing Film Academy, to sum up his disaffection with Jia's career path, he said, "There is a phase when Jia's subject was the absolute pursuit of freedom.

But I think, quite clearly, that period finished with 'Unknown Pleasures'"—the last film that Jia made without government approval.

As Zhang sees it, Jia's decision to seek theatrical release and submit to censorship has ceded the vanguard of China's most politically challenging cinema to a new crop of filmmakers, who work with low-cost digital equipment and never bother to seek government approval. Those films are shown overseas and at a series of low-profile but thriving festivals in China. Typical of this new batch are documentaries such as Zhao Liang's "Crime and Punishment," about interrogation tactics at a remote police station, and Zhao Dayong's "Ghost Town," which records the poverty and cultural desolation of a mountain village far from China's boomtowns.

Most of those films have such tiny audiences that authorities rarely bother to interfere, except when the subject is acutely sensitive. When YunFest, a festival in Yunnan Province, scheduled a screening last year of "Though I Am Gone," a low-budget historical documentary about a schoolteacher in Beijing who was beaten to death by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, authorities, at the last minute, pressured organizers to postpone the festival. (It later convened and showed the film in another city in Yunnan.) In the past, the maker of that film, Hu Jie, has described being visited by state security agents who asked about his work, yet, in a sign of how China's control of filmmaking has slackened from a decade ago, Hu has continued to make films.

Likewise, China's bans on filmmakers are not what they once were. The prominent director Lou Ye was banned from filmmaking for five years after "Summer Palace" (2006), a sexually explicit drama set amid the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, was submitted at Cannes before receiving government approval. And yet, midway through the ban, Lou is hard at work; his latest film, "Spring Fever," is slated to appear in May at Cannes.



"This week, on 'The Amazing Race to Enlightenment,' can Jim and Suzy achieve right mindfulness? And will Barb and Candy be eliminated for relentless clinging to the self?"

Chinese authorities seem to have concluded that art films, screened at festivals for urbane, like-minded audiences, have limited social impact. And, in a sense, Jia has reached the same conclusion. He believes his social critique is strongest not as a protester on the sidelines but as a legal—and marketable—filmmaker. "If we keep filming ordinary workers, that will heighten sympathy and concern for them, and they, in turn, will get closer to freedom," Jia told me. "In the early eighties, many directors made films about women's rights—about their confinement, their unhappy marriages—and, through those films, Chinese people realized that women must be respected and treated equally." Yu, the cinematographer, summed up Jia's strategy for addressing sensitive issues as "the intelligence to be politically critical but in a more discreet sense."

Jia is an auteur with aspirations of populism. ("It's part of a director's job to communicate his works to others," he told me.) But it's not yet clear if he can win China's audience away from martial-arts extravaganzas and mindless comedies without losing the artistic and political energy that got him where he is. By March, with "24 City" still in theatres, he was immersed in his next projects: a historical documentary about Shanghai and a feature, a kung-fu movie set at the turn of the twentieth century—or, as he called it, "an anti-kung-fu movie." ("In most movies, kung fu is all-powerful, but in my film it's getting weaker and weaker," he said.) After more than a decade of chronicling contemporary China, he is increasingly focussed on correcting distortions of Chinese history, even if that is guaranteed to draw official scrutiny. "Topics like the Cultural Revolution, June Fourth, and the anti-rightist campaign are not permitted to be made into films," he told me. "But those incidents affect China today. People are forgetting them. Today's young people don't even know what happened. On one hand, I want to record what's happening in China now, but I feel an urgent need to know more about history."

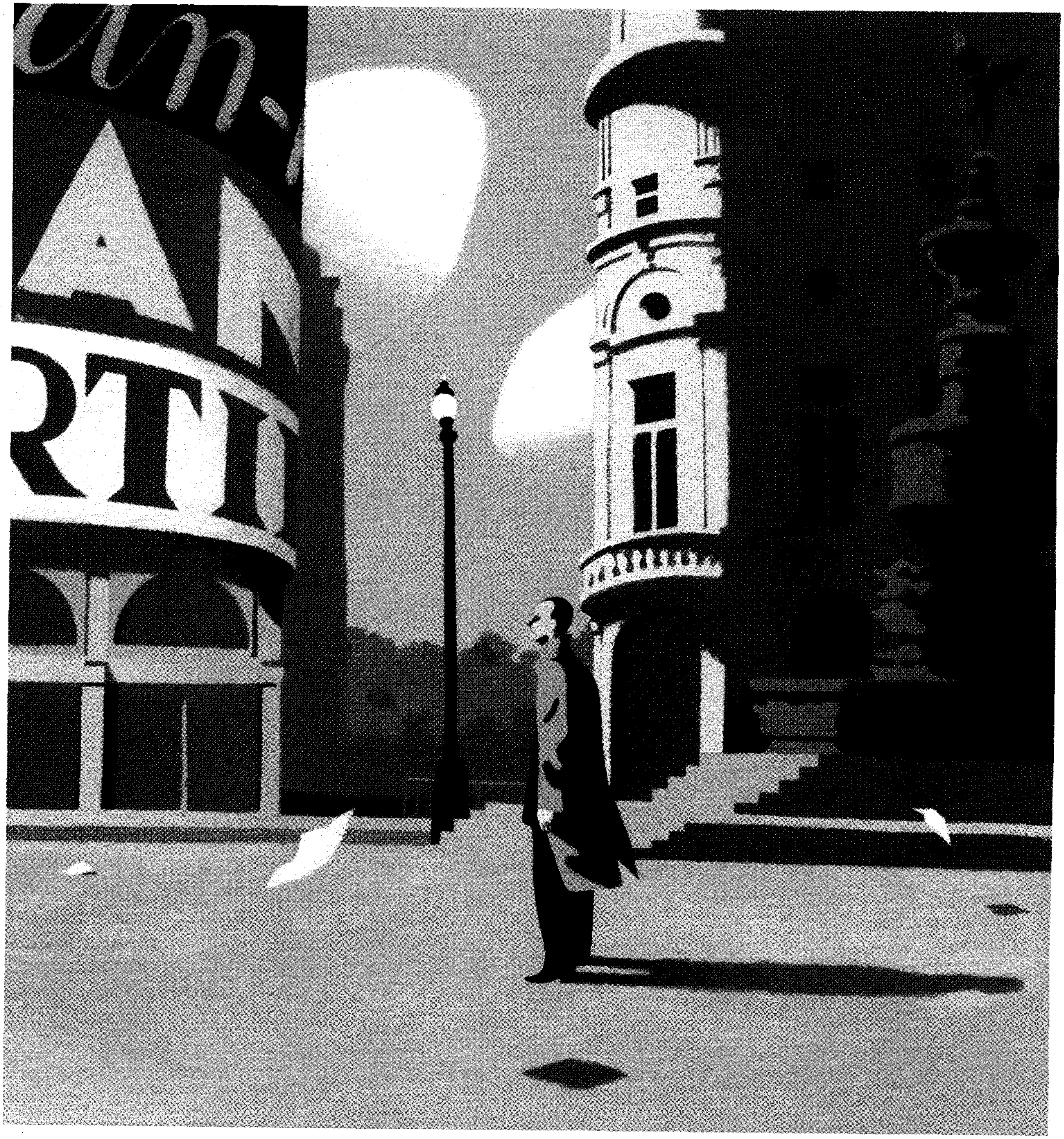
Jia's plans seemed destined to attract criticism: from the government, for exploring China's most sensitive historical chapters, and from art-film fans, for making a kung-fu movie. He hardly seems to mind. He has come to inhabit a limbo of his own making, and that status has put him at odds with both worlds. "My expression, my view on history, my view on the truth must be independent," he says, "but I tell myself not to get marginalized, because being marginalized means you can't do anything. Marginalization can be a kind of pleasant stance—I really admire many of those people—but I would rather expend enormous energy trying to dance with the many levels of the era in which we live." ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/VIDEO
Evan Osnos on the films of Jia Zhangke.

FICTION

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF J.G.B.

BY J. G. BALLARD



On waking one morning, B was surprised to see that Shepperton was deserted. He entered the kitchen at nine o'clock, annoyed to find that neither his post nor the daily newspapers had been delivered, and that a power failure prevented him from preparing his breakfast. He spent an hour staring at the melting ice that dripped from his refrigerator, and then went next door to complain to his neighbor.

Surprisingly, his neighbor's house was empty. His car stood in the drive, but the entire family—husband, wife, children, and dog—had disappeared. Even more odd, the street was filled by an unbroken silence. No traffic moved along the nearby motorway, and not a single aircraft flew overhead toward London Airport. B crossed the road and knocked on several doors. Through the windows, he could see the empty interiors. Nothing in this peaceful suburb was out of place, except for its missing tenants.

Thinking that perhaps some terrible calamity was imminent—a nuclear catastrophe, or a sudden epidemic after a research-laboratory accident—and that by some unfortunate mishap he alone had not been warned, B returned home and switched on his transistor radio. The apparatus worked, but all the stations were silent, the Continental transmitters as well as those of the United Kingdom. Disconcerted, B returned to the street and gazed at the empty sky. It was a calm, sun-filled day, crossed by peaceful clouds that gave no hint of any natural disaster.

B took his car and drove to the center of Shepperton. The town was deserted, and none of the shops were open. A train stood in the station, empty and without any of the passengers who regularly travelled to London. Leaving Shepperton, B crossed the Thames to the nearby town of Walton. There again he found the streets completely silent. He stopped in front of the house owned by his friend P, whose car was parked in her drive. Using the spare key that he carried, he unlocked the front door and entered the house. But even as he called her name he could see that there was no trace of the young woman. She had not slept in her bed. In the kitchen, the melting ice of the refrigerator had formed a large pool on the floor. There was no electric power, and the telephone was dead.

Resuming his journey, B systematically explored the neighboring towns, circling them all as he approached central London. He was not surprised to find the huge metropolis totally deserted. He drove down an empty Piccadilly, crossed Trafalgar Square in silence, and parked outside the unguarded Buckingham Palace. As dusk fell, he decided to return to Shepperton. He had almost run out of fuel and was forced to break into a filling station. However, no policemen were out on patrol or in their stations. He left behind him an immense city plunged into darkness, where the only lights were the reflections of his headlamps.

B passed a disturbed night, with the radio mute beside his bed. But when he woke to another luminous morning his confidence returned. After an initial doubt, he was relieved to see that Shepperton was still deserted. The food within his refrigerator had begun to rot; he needed fresh provisions and a means of cooking for himself. He drove into Shepperton, broke a window of the supermarket, and collected several cartons of canned meat and vegetables, rice, and sugar. In the hardware store, he found a paraffin stove, and took it home with a tin of fuel. Water no longer flowed in the mains, but he estimated that the contents of the roof cistern would last him a week or more. Further forays to the local stores furnished him with a supply of candles, flashlights, and batteries.

In the following week, B made several expeditions to London. He returned to the houses and flats of his friends, but found them empty. He broke into Scotland Yard and the newspaper offices in Fleet Street, in the hope of finding some explanation for the disappearance of an entire population. Lastly, he entered the Houses of Parliament, and stood in the silent debating chamber of the Commons, breathing the stale air. However, there was not the least explanation anywhere of what had taken place. In the streets of the city, he saw not a single cat or dog. It was only when he visited London Zoo that he found that the birds still remained within their cages. They seemed delighted to see B, but flew off with famished cries when he unlocked the bars.

So at least he had a kind of companionship. During the next month, and throughout the summer, B continued his preparations for survival. He drove as far north as Birmingham without seeing a soul, then drove down to the south coast and followed the road from Brighton to Dover. Standing on the cliffs, he gazed at the distant shoreline of France. In the marina, he chose a motorboat with a full tank of fuel and set out across the calm sea, now free of the customary pleasure craft, petroleum tankers, and cross-Channel ferries. At Calais, he wandered for an hour through the deserted streets, and in the silent shops listened in vain to telephones that never rang. Then he retraced his steps to the port and returned to England.

When the summer was followed by a mild autumn, B had established a pleasant and comfortable existence for himself. He had abundant stocks of tinned food, fuel, and water with which to survive the winter. The river was nearby, clear and free of all pollution, and petrol was easy to obtain, in unlimited quantities, from the filling stations and parked cars. At the local police station, he assembled a small armory of pistols and carbines, to deal with any unexpected menace that might appear.

But his only visitors were the birds, and he scattered handfuls of rice and seeds on his lawn and on those of his former neighbors. Already he had begun to forget them, and Shepperton soon became an extraordinary aviary, filled with birds of every species.

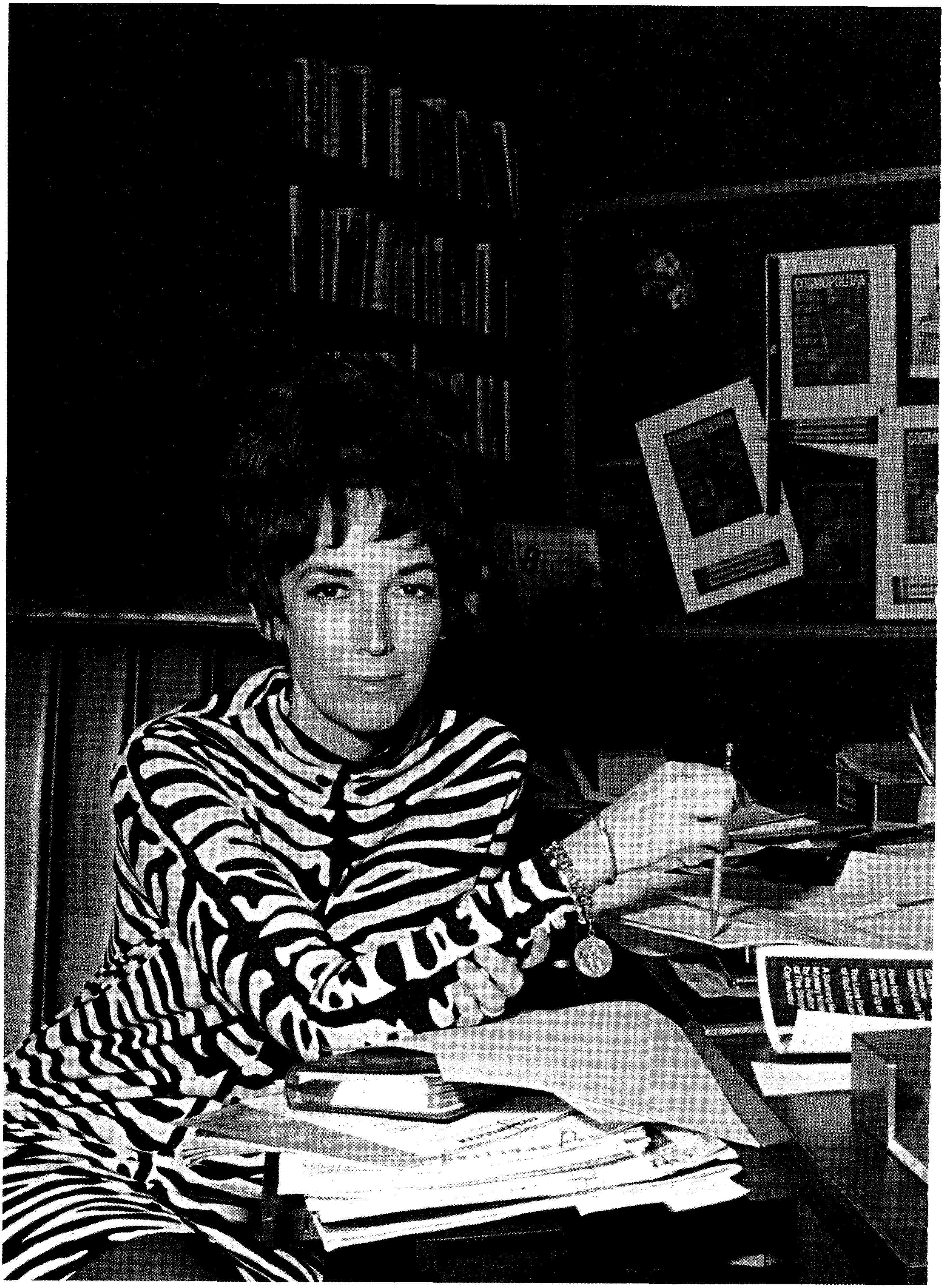
Thus the year ended peacefully, and B was ready to begin his true work. ♦

JEAN-FRANÇOIS MARTIN

MOST FASCINATING NEWS STORY OF THE WEEK

From a Wall Street Journal article about replacing office chairs with gym balls.

It can also be an office safety hazard, says Andrew Concors, a physical therapist and certified industrial ergonomist at San Diego-based CPT Consulting. He has had a couple of patients in the past who have ruptured their balls at home while sitting on them and doing exercises.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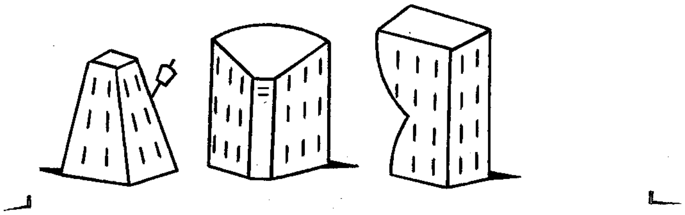
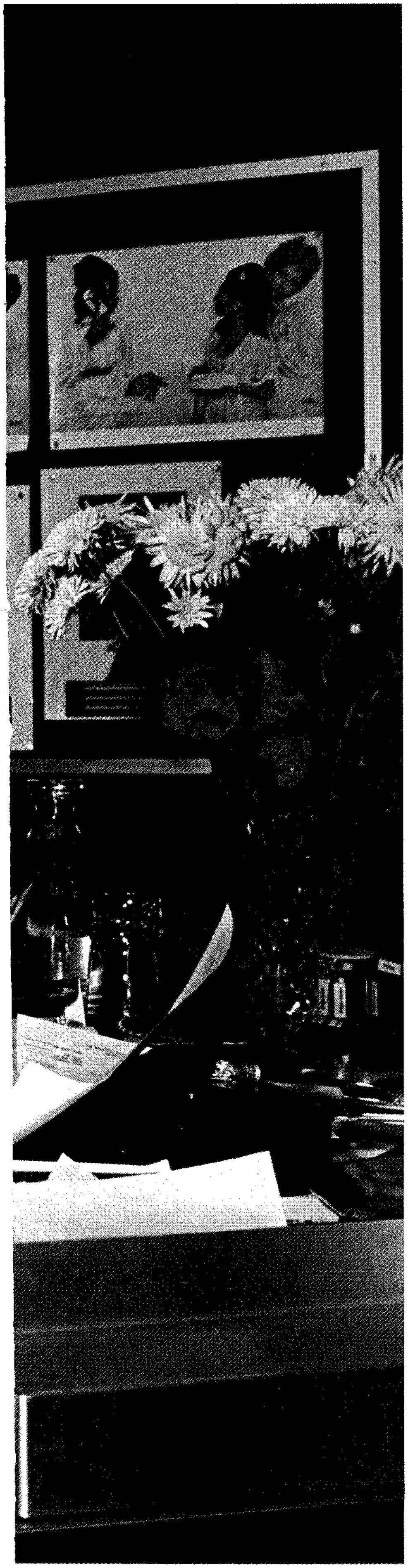


BOOKS

HELENISM

The birth of the Cosmo Girl.

BY JUDITH THURMAN



Helen Gurley Brown in the nineteen-sixties, in her office at Cosmopolitan.

"Sexual intercourse," according to the British poet Philip Larkin, "began / In nineteen sixty-three / (Which was rather late for me)— / Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban / And the Beatles' first LP." This, it turns out, is complete nonsense. Sexual intercourse began for Larkin, at the very latest, in the early nineteen-forties, with his teen-aged girlfriend, and continued at an energetic pace with a variety of women, including his secretary and the wife of a colleague—at one point, he shared his favors among three lovers—until he died, in his early sixties. I mention Larkin's amorous history, and cite his succinct, famous poem "Annus Mirabilis" (the narrator goes on to describe the relations between men and women of his generation as "A sort of bargaining, / A wrangle for the ring, / A shame that started at sixteen / And spread to everything") because in 1963 Helen Gurley Brown, Larkin's elder by six months (they were both forty-one), had been fornicating shamelessly for half her life, and had proclaimed to the world, in "Sex and the Single Girl," published a year earlier, that "nice girls" not only did it before and outside of wedlock but loved it, and were, just like men, entitled to obsess about it, to rack up conquests, and to trade in their partners, preferably for an upgrade.

Brown is now eighty-seven and, for the first time, the subject of a biography, "Bad Girls Go Everywhere" (Oxford; $27.95), by Jennifer Scanlon, a professor of gender and women's studies at Bowdoin College. Despite the title ("Good girls go to heaven, bad girls go everywhere" is one of Brown's favorite mottoes), this is a serious academic reconsideration of a figure who, Scanlon argues, has been slighted by feminist history, and deserves a place in its pantheon, particularly because she was speaking to and for the typists, the flight attendants, and the sales clerks who couldn't afford to burn a good bra, rather than the college-educated sisterhood that was "womanning" the barricades of the nineteen-seventies.

I'm happy to see Brown getting her due as a pioneer of libidinal equality, but I was also pleased to learn from the book that she has gained some weight. (She is now a hundred and twenty-five pounds of fun, up from a hundred.) After a lifetime of ruthless dieting, daily weigh-ins, fasting to compensate for an extra bite, plus a ninety-minute exercise routine, with dumbbells, that she stuck to seven days a week (even on the day of her mother's funeral), she has finally decided that she deserves the odd chocolate-chip cookie. And she does deserve it. Her example of heroic discipline in the service of ageless sex appeal—at sixty-eight, she looked terrific frugging in a pink feather-and-sequin minidress—has been an inspiration to the millions of readers of her racy memoirs and self-improvement guides, and of *Cosmopolitan*, the magazine that she took over in 1965 and transformed from a venerable if moribund cultural monthly into a hot, upbeat sourcebook of advice for the working girl on beauty, money, makeup, dating, dieting, therapy, dressing for success, undressing for success, and driving men wild.

In everything that Brown has written or edited, she has promoted the message that sex is great, and that one should get as much of it as possible. (Ditto for money.) Just about everyone knows this, and has always known it, but in Brown's youth few women would admit it, even to themselves. So if, in 1963, sex did cease to be quite so clandestine a pleasure—especially for unmarried females—that was, in part, her doing.

"Bad Girls Go Everywhere" is the story of a woman who, mostly to her credit and greatly to her profit and glory, never knew how to blush, and who exhorted her readers to follow her example of self-invention in a buoyant, dishy, emphatic style that includes words like "pippy-poo." Brown told her readers in 1962, "I think marriage is insurance for the *worst* years of your life. During your best years you don't need a husband. You do need a man of course every step of the way, and they are often cheaper emotionally and a lot more fun by the dozen."

"Sex and the Single Girl," a primer for the would-be femme fatale, was addressed to the "mouseburgers" of America: average-looking, high-school-educated women with unrealized potential, like the hungry girl Brown had been. Helen Gurley was born in Green Forest, Arkansas, a hamlet in the Ozarks, into a family that she described as "hillbillies." She grew up comfortably in Little Rock until, when she was ten, her father died. During the Depression, her widowed mother had to take in sewing, and, as their poverty deepened, she moved with Helen and her older sister, Mary, to Los Angeles, where she eked out a living tagging merchandise at a Sears, Roebuck. Mary contracted polio, and was crippled for life. Helen never went to college, despite having graduated from high school as her class valedictorian. (It's a shame that Scanlon didn't find that valedictory address in the Brown archives, which are at Smith College, but it's nice to think that they share space in a vault there with the papers of Sylvia Plath.) Yet, with "steely determination," Scanlon writes, and with steelier thighs, Brown cleared every hurdle on her path to the four-story penthouse on Central Park where she now resides.

There is nothing wrong, Brown has always said, with improving on nature where nature was stingy, as it was, she feels, in her own case. "What you have to do is work with the raw material you have, namely you, and never let up," she wrote. "Unlike Madame Bovary you don't chase the glittering life, you lay a trap for it. You tunnel up from the bottom." So, by all means, tunnel your way into the bank vault with a nose job, breast implants, and a face-lift when the time comes (it comes sooner than you think), starve yourself, and don't let your upper arms get stringy. Fake hair, too, is always an option. Long before Brown was earning a seven-figure salary—when she was, in fact, earning a four-figure salary—she scrimped and saved to dress like a million dollars. One suggestion for scrimping was to charm an out-of-town stranger you had picked up at a bar into giving you cab fare, let him hail you a cab, then jump out a block later and keep the change. Another hint: "Write fan letters to big companies. Sometimes they send samples."

Some of Brown's advice to the huntress was eccentric: "Driving in heavy traffic offers possibilities. Leave the window rolled down on your side and always look interestedly into the next car." Some, she admitted, was "almost ghoulish," as when she suggested trolling for a boyfriend at "a wealthy chapter of A.A. Might as well start with a *solvent* problem child, like say someone with liquid assets." And some, decades later, seems downright quaint, like her battle plan for furnishing an apartment to make it a mantrap: you should have a good TV (but not too big—you'd never pry him loose to start spending money on you), a brandy snifter filled with loose cigarettes, lots of sexy cushions, and a well-stocked liquor cabinet, with the proviso that your "beaux" should always replace at least as much of your booze as they drank. Also, a smart girl was tightfisted with her home cooking. Brown's formula was twenty restaurant dinners at his expense to one cozy supper whipped up by you as a little thank-you for his largesse, which, you hoped, included expensive "prezzies." Brown has always approved of making men pay for their pleasures—or, not to put too fine a point on it, of knowing how to "use" them. (Just remember to hang on their every word, and never say that you're too tired for sex.)

A sexy woman, according to Brown, is a woman who, at any age and under almost any circumstances, likes sex with men. (Gays and lesbians were always fine with her—they liked sex, too—but she couldn't relate.) In her most recent book of advice, "Late Show," she urges her contemporaries to express their womanliness by "welcoming a penis," rather than, say, wasting their time "doling out money for a grandchild's college tuition." In "Sex and the Single Girl," she affirmed that "liking men is . . . by and large just about the sexiest thing you can do. But I mean really liking, not just pretending. And there is quite a lot more to it than simply wagging your tail. . . . His collie dog does *that* much." (It seems apropos to add here that if you have not yet figured out fellatio, or your technique needs remediation, see "Having It All," page 225.)

Her own notable career as an anthrophile began, she recalled, at the age of nine, in Arkansas, when she fooled around with, or was fooled around with by, a thirteen-year-old uncle in the attic of a family house. She started dating at sixteen and lost her virginity at twenty, to a factory worker in Los Angeles, her boyfriend of two years. (If you are curious—and you are: "Deflowering didn't hurt, I didn't bleed, I had an orgasm.") Before that relationship was consummated, she had answered a help-wanted ad for an escort agency and, a bit naïve about the job description, spent an evening driving around the Hollywood hills with a middle-aged client, who exacted five dollars' worth of kisses from her, and offered her another five to go all the way. She declined politely. She was, at the time, employed as a typist at a radio station whose male personnel enjoyed a game that they called Scuttle. They chased a female co-worker around the office until they cornered her, then pulled off her panties. Brown was hurt that, for some reason—maybe she was too flat-chested—she was never their scuttlebutt. It was eventually pointed out to her that scuttling constituted a rather egregious instance of sexual harassment. In her view, however, most advances, including unwanted ones, are a compliment, and a girl should have enough street smarts to deflect them without making it "a federal offense." She noted, "If you're not a sex object, you're in trouble."

Brown was always smarter, more ambitious, and better-looking than she let on—she didn't want to compromise her credibility as a mouseburger—even though she has never encouraged her followers to play dumb, just, perhaps, to look dumb. ("A man likes to sleep with a brainy girl. She's a challenge. If he makes good with her, he figures he must be good himself.") She spent her early twenties in a series of lowly clerical positions, rose to become an executive secretary, found a mentor in her boss at an ad agency, and by her early thirties was one of the most successful female copywriters on the West Coast. Advertising was, with publishing, a field in which a woman of her generation could, as she put it, be "paid handsomely not to think like a man."

It was always against her principles to quit her day job —"A job gives a single woman something to *be*"—but not against them to work the night shift as a kept woman. One of her bosses was a married studio executive who set her up in her own apartment, paid her an allowance, and promised her a stock portfolio. (I was touched to learn from Scanlon that Brown used some of the cash she pilfered from this man—she admitted to "stealing him blind"—to buy a *New Yorker* subscription for her sister, who was back in Arkansas, living miserably with their mother.) Married men made excellent "pets," she concluded, especially if you had more than one, although in "Sex and the Office," a sequel to "Sex and the Single Girl," which was published in 1964, she did not explicitly recommend sleeping with the boss—"I think it's better to keep this darling as a friend, someone who may from time to time advise you about *other* men."

Brown has always been a master of the mixed message, Scanlon observes, and the same woman who pitied housewives their drab domestic lives wrangled as expertly for a wedding ring as any of Larkin's teases. In 1959, at thirty-seven, she "hooked" the eminently eligible and attractive movie producer David Brown. She told her readers, "He was sought after by many a Hollywood starlet as well as some less flamboyant but more deadly types. And *I* got him!" She got him and kept him—"the world's best husband" is now ninety-two, and this year he and Helen will celebrate their golden anniversary. (David, according to his partner in the film business, Richard Zanuck, believed that if Helen had ever caught him having an affair she would literally have killed him.) Scanlon writes, "Consciously or not, the couple found a workable formula for their marriage: he would support her, unequivocally, in her professional life, and she would serve him, unequivocally, in their domestic world."

After reading a cache of her love letters to one of his predecessors, David decided that Helen had the material, and the talent, to write a best-seller, and "Sex and the Single Girl" was conceived. He has always acted as her mentor, agent, business manager, promoter, and confidant, and he helped with both moral support and editorial advice at *Cosmopolitan*, where he wrote the cover lines. (He had been the magazine's managing editor in the nineteen-forties.) But the books and the magazine were *her* babies, and together the Browns had no others. "We're just too selfishly well-mated," David said. But pregnancy and motherhood repelled Brown for complex reasons: the privations they had imposed on her mother, Scanlon suggests, but also, perhaps, getting fat, and losing one's sex appeal—the illusion of nubility. The womb, Brown once wrote, was a "built-in mechanism" for turning women into drudges. She sympathized with the plight of single mothers, and sometimes featured stories about them, but *Cosmopolitan* was famously child-unfriendly.

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Gloria Steinem, among other critics, urged her to moderate her hostility, and even David told her to "shut up" about it—she was alienating her subscribers.

Had David Brown met Helen Gurley at twenty, she wrote, he wouldn't have looked at her, and she "wouldn't have known what to do with him." But he was, she believed, seduced by her independence and by her singularity, rather than by her feminine wiles. (She had just spent five thousand dollars of her savings on a new Mercedes sports car that symbolized to both of them how far she had come in the world on the strength of her own wits and determination.) To "package" her charms irresistibly for a good provider, she preached, a single girl should provide for herself. And that may be Brown's most enlightened lesson: that sexual autonomy and fulfillment are inseparable from the autonomy and fulfillment that a woman gets from her career.

At her most radical, Brown was a subversive rather than a revolutionary; a sexual libertarian rather than a liberator; and an unapologetic partisan of free enterprise. (She once called Margaret Thatcher a "Cosmo Girl.") "How could any woman not be a feminist?" she wondered, in 1985, in an interview on her twentieth anniversary at *Cosmopolitan*. "The girl I'm editing for wants to be known for herself. If that's not a feminist message, I don't know what is."

Feminists come in every bra size, and what feminist would deny or belittle Brown's achievements? But, whoever her reader was, the dewy model or celebrity who appeared on the cover of her magazine every month for thirty-two years never resembled Mrs. Thatcher, and, indeed, looked suspiciously like a bimbo to the older generation of militants for women's rights, who were less inclined than Scanlon is to acknowledge Brown's contributions to the history of the movement. Steinem suggested to Brown that she was a victim of the patriarchy. To Brown's chagrin, *Cosmo* was often described as *Playboy's* twin sister. A British journalist coined the indelible phrase "deep-cleavage feminism" to describe the magazine's philosophy. In 1970, Kate Millett led a group of protesters who occupied Brown's offices and demanded that she publish more articles with a feminist perspective. (She did publish an excerpt from Millett's manifesto "Sexual Politics," and she agreed to participate in a consciousness-raising session, of which she later said, "I was only into my eighth hangup when I had to relinquish the floor to the next hangup-ee.")

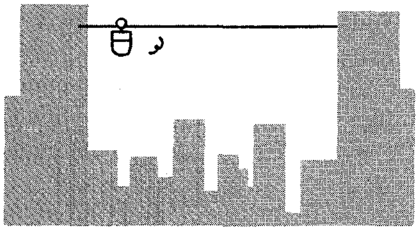
One hesitates to seek a moral in the glittering life of a bad girl, and Helen Gurley Brown, thank goodness, is incorrigible. That is the dissonance in Scanlon's redemptive approach: the colorless prose that keeps its ankles decorously crossed on the dais; the savant discussions of second-wave and third-wave and "lipstick" feminism; and the vision of Brown as a transitional species of New Woman. No, she was a classic poor girl on the make, lusty and driven, who, with her husband's help, found a clever formula that wasn't unique, except perhaps in its crude honesty, for marketing her own worldly wisdom. And now she is a great old tough cookie, whose survival one applauds. Most of all, Scanlon's portrait reminds one it has never been easy to be both a woman and a person—that femininity (like masculinity) is, to some extent, a performance. What has changed since Brown wrote "Sex and the Single Girl" is that women have more roles to play, on a greater stage. She helped—but only modestly—to expand the repertoire.

In one of her incarnations, Brown was the host of a radio talk show. A caller asked if she thought that diamonds really were a girl's best friend. That notion, Scanlon points out, was first proposed by another shameless, enterprising native daughter of and famous escapee from Little Rock: Lorelei Lee. She was the adorably mercenary heroine of Anita Loos's "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," and the first Material Girl in a lineage from which the Cosmo Girl, Madonna, and Carrie Bradshaw all descend. Brown began her answer by lamenting the demise of gold-digging: "I think all the sugar daddies dissolved in their own sugar or something, and chorus girls have to compete with all the other pretty girls there are nowadays." Then she added that one could marry a rich man for big diamonds, or a poorer man for smaller diamonds, but maybe the best idea was to buy one's own diamonds. Attention shoppers: a girl's best friend is herself. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

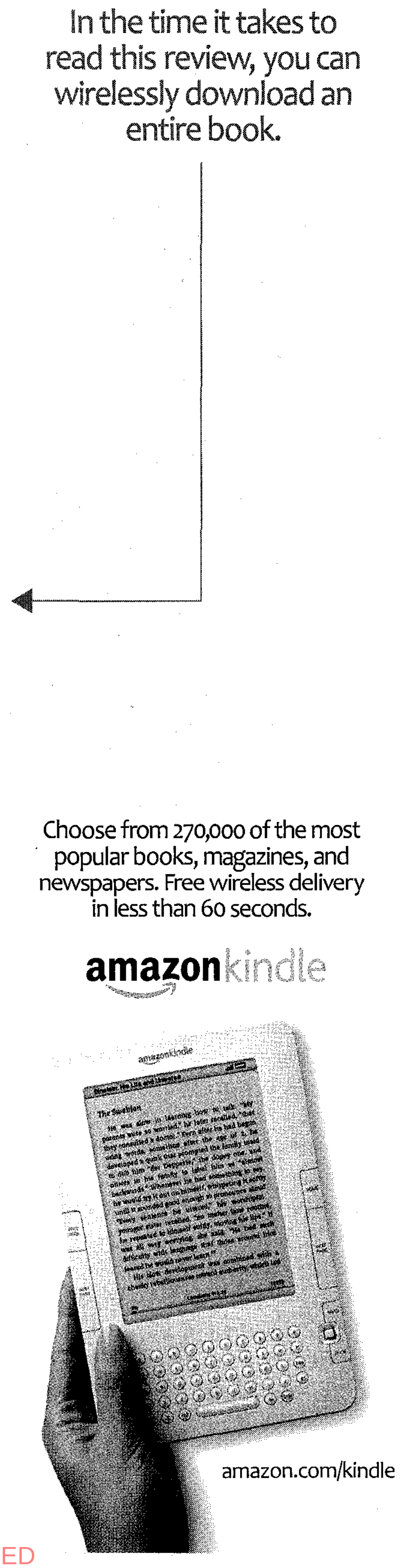
How to Win a Cosmic War, *by Reza Aslan (Random House; $26).* Aslan's thoughtful analysis of America's war on terror argues that the nation's jihadist enemies believe the conflict is taking place on a spiritual, "cosmic" plane and thus cannot be lost. Only by denying the terrorists their good-versus-evil religious narrative can the United States keep the war grounded and winnable. Certainly this is good advice, although, given President Obama's abandonment of his predecessor's Manichaean foreign policy, it may have been overtaken by recent events. Far more interesting is Aslan's agreement with Bush on the question of democracy. He distinguishes Islamist nationalist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah from global jihadist groups such as Al Qaeda, and contends that recognizing the former as legitimate participants in the democratic process will undermine support for unyielding war. It's an appealing, if unproved, claim.

The Parents We Mean to Be, *by Richard Weissbourd (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; $25).* In this ardent and persuasive inquiry, Weissbourd, a Harvard psychologist, warns that "happiness-besotted" parents do children a disservice by emphasizing personal fulfillment over empathy. (A high-school English teacher laments the difficulty of teaching "King Lear" to students who "can't engage suffering in any way.") Parents worry about their children's confidence, but constant, preëmptive praise can turn kids into cynics; studies show that playground bullies (and, later in life, criminals) exhibit high self-esteem. Drawing on extensive field research, Weissbourd makes the case that parents, as models of behavior, must be vigilant about their own moral choices. If we're afraid to risk our kids' ire by criticizing them, how can we expect them to resist peer pressure? Of special concern are parents who try too hard to be their kids' friends. Weissbourd explains, "Children have no incentive to become like us, because the message we're giving is that they already are."



Natural Elements, *by Richard Mason (Knopf; $25.95).* Mason's first novel was published while he was a nineteen-year-old undergraduate at Oxford; this third effort is an immensely readable magnum opus that encompasses the Boer War, the French Resistance, the conflict in Iraq, geriatric psychiatry, high finance, and metallurgy. Sometimes Mason's meticulous research threatens to intrude on the narrative—we learn a little too much about osmium-carbon double bonds, for instance—and the link between the story's many disparate elements can be strained. Mason is at his most engaging when he lets the details fall away and deals in unabashed melodrama. There is a touch of Daphne du Maurier in the way an elderly woman, deposited in a nursing home by her high-flying commodities-trading daughter, stalks its antiseptic hallways avenging herself on nocturnal hallucinations from her past.

Out of My Skin, *by John Haskell (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $14).* A journalist leaves New York in the wake of a failed love affair and heads to Los Angeles, hoping to write about movies. He winds up interviewing a Steve Martin impersonator and is inspired to try "being Steve" himself—not as a paid gig but as a daily incarnation. What at first seems like just another novel about L.A. anomie turns out to be something more transfixing: a kind of pop Zen parable, at once whimsical and austere. Haskell cultivates a winking deadpan to chronicle his narrator's twilight of the soul, inserting revelations in unexpected places. When the narrator (who, inevitably, becomes an actor) is cast as a monster in a video game and required to lift a heavy co-star for a prolonged shot, he hopes that "with acceptance the pain would lose its meaning"; later, he discovers a raisin abandoned on a table at Starbucks, "glowing with its raisinness."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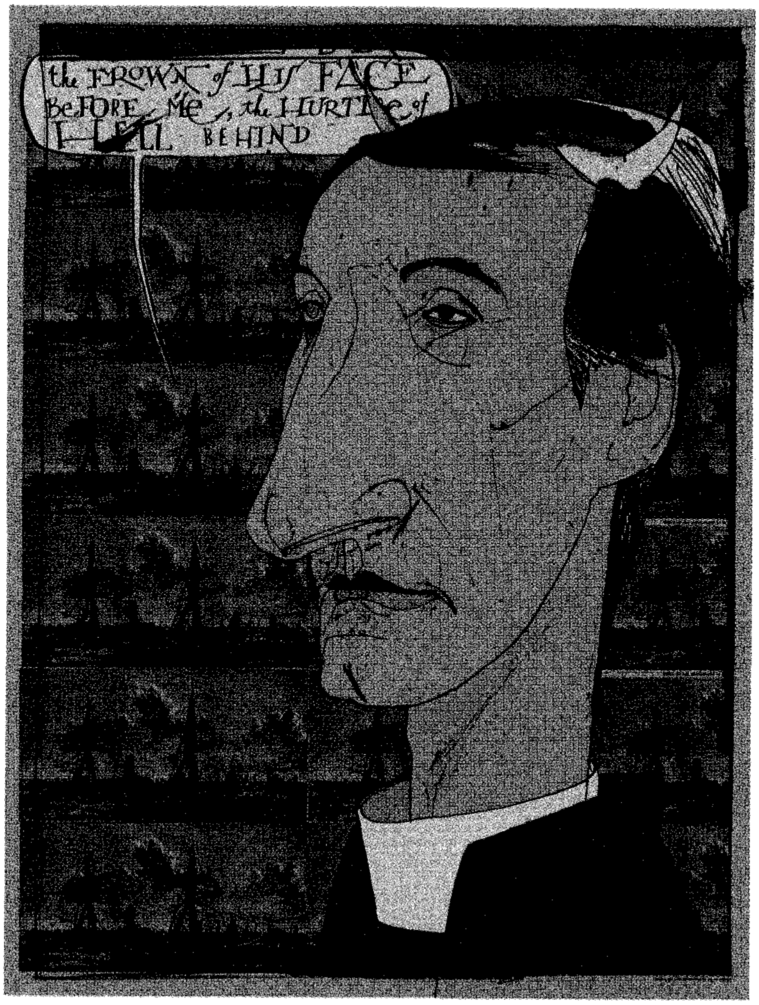
BOOKS

BACK TO BASICS

How Gerard Manley Hopkins remade English poetry.

BY ADAM KIRSCH


the FROWN of HIS FACE BeFORE Me, the HURTLE of HELL BEHIND

Hopkins's faith made him almost masochistically ambivalent about his writing.

DAVID HUGHES

English poetry began with a vision of God. Caedmon, the first English poet whose name we know—he lived in the seventh century, in the town of Whitby—was not a poet by training. He knew so little about the art, in fact, that at parties, when guests played the popular game of improvising verses to the harp, he would always slip away and go home. After one such party, the Venerable Bede recounts, Caedmon went to the stables and fell asleep among the horses. He dreamed that a man appeared to him, demanding, "Caedmon, sing me something." When he protested that he didn't know how, the divine messenger insisted, "Nevertheless, you must sing," and gave him a subject: "Sing about the Creation." Instantly, he began to recite, in the alliterative, heavily stressed lines of Anglo-Saxon verse, the hymn now recognized as the first surviving English poem: "Now we must praise heaven-kingdom's Guardian,/ the Measurer's might and his mind-plans,/the work of the Glory-Father, when he of wonders of every one,/eternal Lord, the beginning established."

Modern English poetry, many readers have felt, is virtually a different art from the one practiced by Caedmon and his glorious successors over the next thousand years. Starting around the turn of the twentieth century, poets seemed to break with all the traditions of English verse, reclaiming poetry as a new genre for an utterly transformed world. Yet the origins of modern poetry can be traced to a revelation strangely parallel to Caedmon's—the sudden inspiration of a devoted Christian, who emerged from long silence to sing a masterpiece to the Creator.

For Gerard Manley Hopkins, however, the divine calling came not in a dream in a stable but from an article in the *Times* of London—the first of many signs that the modern poet's vision would be more ambiguous, and much less happy, than that of the medieval scop. On December 8, 1875, Hopkins read the newspaper's account of a shipwreck off the coast of Kent. The Deutschland, a steamer carrying emigrants from Bremen to New York, had run aground in a storm, and more than fifty of its passengers and crew were drowned. Hopkins, who was in Wales studying theology as part of his nine-year training to become a Jesuit priest, was especially struck by the detail that five of the dead were Franciscan nuns—exiles from imperial Germany, where Bismarck was prosecuting his Kulturkampf against the Catholic Church.

In his new biography, "Gerard Manley Hopkins" (Viking; $34.95), Paul Mariani quotes the *Times'* terrible description of their final hours: "Five German nuns . . . clasped hands and were drowned together, the chief sister, a gaunt woman 6 ft. high, calling out loudly and often 'O Christ, come quickly!' till the end came. The shrieks and sobbing of women and children are described by the survivors as agonizing." Hopkins "was affected by the account," he told a friend years later, "and happening to say so to my rector he said that he wished someone would write a poem on the subject. On this hint I set to work and, though my hand was out at first, produced one."

Although Hopkins had been devoted to poetry during his years at Oxford, he had written almost nothing in the previous seven years, having sworn off poetry when he decided to become a Jesuit.

He had even burned his youthful verses, in what he called, in his diary, a "slaughter of the innocents." Yet the poem that he now produced, "The Wreck of the Deutschland," is not the work of a writer who is trying to relearn old tricks. It is the astonishingly confident proclamation of a poet who is creating a new style, even a new language, as he goes along:

> Thou mastering me
> God! giver of breath and bread;
> World's strand, sway of the sea;
> Lord of living and dead;
> Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
> And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
> Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
> Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.

Hopkins has something of Caedmon's vigor: the strong alliterations, the plain Anglo-Saxon vocabulary of "bread" and "bones," and the marked rhythms, so unlike the fluent pentameter of most English poetry. Yet, even in these first lines, it is clear that Hopkins is not out simply to "praise heaven-kingdom's Guardian" but to interrogate him. His subject is not the creation but suffering and death, which inevitably leads him to the mysteries of theodicy. Hopkins may be addressing "Thou mastering me God"—the gerund forced to do duty as an adjective, in one of his characteristically modern wrenchings of language—but he does so in fear and trembling, with "The frown of his face / Before me, the hurtle of hell / Behind."

In this, "The Wreck of the Deutschland," which is not just Hopkins's first mature poem but his longest, sounds the keynote for all his work. It is no coincidence that it was the suffering of the nuns that moved this clergyman to break his long silence; in their fate, Hopkins finds a dramatic correlative of the quieter, more inward suffering that was his own lot. He may have been "Away in the loveable west, / On a pastoral forehead of Wales" when the Deutschland went down, but he identifies strongly with the tall nun who cried, "O Christ, Christ, come quickly," even as God sent his storms to drown her. This perfect willingness to be sacrificed, which made the nun truly Christlike—"The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst Best," Hopkins writes—was his own religious ideal. To realize it, he sacrificed almost every happiness and ambition he possessed—including his vocation as a poet, which he loved and resisted with almost equal force.

For Hopkins, who was born a Protestant, becoming a Catholic in the first place required a great deal of sacrifice. Shortly before he was received into the Church by John Henry Newman, the most notorious Catholic convert in England, in 1866, at the age of twenty-two, his family reacted to his choice with horrified incomprehension: "The blow is so deadly and great that we have not yet recovered from the first shock of it," his father wrote. Becoming a Catholic meant giving up any hope of a career in the university, the Anglican Church, or most professions; it meant severing respectable social ties, and joining a minority that had been persecuted and feared in England since the time of Elizabeth.

Still, it was not uncommon for spiritually gifted young men, like Hopkins, to abandon the tepid Church of England for Rome. Ever since Newman's own conversion, some twenty years earlier, it had been a kind of scandalous trend among Oxford undergraduates. Mariani quotes the disgusted reaction of one of Hopkins's tutors to the news of his conversion: "I imagine him—perhaps uncharitably—to be one of those, like his ideal J. H. Newman, who instead of simply opening themselves to the revelation of God in the reasonable world, are fain to put themselves into an attitude—saintly, it is true, but still an attitude. . . . [He] hugs his own 'refined pleasures' or (which is but a higher form of the same) his personal sanctity."

When the established church spoke in tones like these—clinging to the "reasonable" and respectable, viewing extraordinary religious passion as "an attitude"—it is no wonder that Hopkins fled it for what he viewed as the greater seriousness and authority of the Roman Catholic Church. He defended his decision to his father in terms that were themselves a rebuke to Anglican worldliness: "I cannot fight against God Who calls me to His Church: if I were to delay and die in the meantime I shd. have no plea why my soul was not forfeit. I have no power in fact to stir a finger: it is God Who makes the decision and not I."

Hopkins never regretted his decision to convert, or to join one of the most demanding of priestly orders. Yet his life as a priest, Mariani shows, was often a sad and weary one, beset by doubts and depression. Outwardly, his existence was undramatic. After 1868, when he became a novice, his days were regulated by his superiors, who sent him from place to place in the British Isles, first to study, then to teach. His relations with his family remained distant, and he had only a few friends outside the priesthood whom he corresponded with—above all, the poets Robert Bridges and Richard Watson Dixon, with whom he could share his increasingly adventurous experiments in verse. Given this relative eventlessness, Mariani's biography is mostly a running paraphrase of Hopkins's letters and poems, with much interesting information about the institutional and spiritual lives of the Jesuits as background.

Despite his religious passion, however, Hopkins's career in the Society of Jesus was inglorious. He was prevented from advancing in the hierarchy by his poor performance on a theology exam, and while his colleagues liked him very much, they had a low opinion of his talents and stamina. Long after his death, a fellow-Jesuit, speaking to Hopkins's first biographer, recalled, "I cannot say he was a success either as a teacher or a missioner. He was too whimsical, and . . . he was too delicate a mind for a good deal of the rough work that we have to do in the Society."

It was because Hopkins's superiors in England had so little use for him, Mariani shows, that they encouraged him to take a position as Professor of Greek and Examiner in Classics at the Royal University of Ireland, in Dublin. This prestigious-sounding post actually involved teaching elementary Latin and grading a truly staggering number of tests: six examinations times seven hundred and fifty students, according to Hopkins, for a total of forty-five hundred papers every year. From the college, he issued a series of increasingly desperate cries for help. "The melancholy I have all my life been subject to has become of late years not indeed more intense in its fits but rather more distributed, constant, and crippling," he told a friend in 1885. "When I am at the worst, though my judgment is never affected, my state is much like madness. I see no ground for thinking I shall ever get over it or ever succeed in doing anything that is not forced on me to do of any consequence."

By 1888, Hopkins had given up hope: "It seems to me I can not always last like this: in mind or body or both I shall give way—and all I really need is a certain degree of relief and change; but I do not think that what I need I shall get in time to save me." When he died, of typhoid fever, the following year, at the age of forty-four, his friend Bridges—a respected man of letters, who was to become England's poet laureate—pronounced Hopkins's life a total failure. "That dear Gerard was overworked, unhappy and would never have done anything great seems to give no solace. But how much worse it would have been had his promise or performance been more splendid. He seems to have been entirely lost and destroyed by those Jesuits." It was not until 1918 that Bridges finally got around to publishing his friend's poems, of which he thought so little, thus beginning Hopkins's rapid posthumous ascent to the first rank of English poets.

Hopkins's life can be seen, in other words, as a slow-motion shipwreck, in which he was lost as surely as the nuns off the Kentish coast. But Mariani, a poet and a prolific biographer of poets, prefers not to see it that way. Hopkins's story may be grim, and his correspondence full of anguish, but Mariani's portrait is flushed with the golden light of Hopkins's language. For if Hopkins wrote some of the most existentially despairing lyrics in modern literature, he is also one of the most delighted rhapsodists of the natural world. The almost Cubist style that he began to develop in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" was also capable of thrilling effects like the famous opening of "The Windhover":

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy!

Surely a man who could write like this, Mariani seems to say, cannot finally be regarded as unhappy. The very texture of Mariani's prose pays homage to Hopkins's verse, to the point that his book sometimes reads like an excitable pastiche of its subject: "So give it a day, a date, a going forth, a crossing over, all in an instant, finally, a yes and a yes again."

Just as important, however, is the way Mariani—who dedicates the book to his son, a Jesuit priest—insists that Hopkins's religious vocation and his poetic vocation were mutually nourishing. He sees Hopkins's decision to convert to Catholicism, then to become a priest, as part of the same passion for God that produced his exhilarated lyrics, and his preternaturally close observation of the created world. Mariani even writes, at times, as if taking vows invested Hopkins with poetic superpowers: "But something more has happened, something deeper: a new energy, a new focus, a new way of seeing, different from what Oxford and London have taught him, something more grounded in the earth, the humus, a humility which lets him see others and himself more clearly, as if the world itself in all its humdrum quotidian had been renewed, and this the Eighth Day of Creation."

For Mariani, then, Hopkins the poet is Hopkins the priest in another guise. It is only natural to make such a deduction from his poems, which move from description of the creation to praise of the Creator. "The world is charged with the grandeur of God," Hopkins proclaims in the first line of "God's Grandeur"; "Glory be to God for dappled things," begins "Pied Beauty." These sentiments seem to turn his poems into hymns, and he is one of the rare modern poets who appeal equally to the literary avant-garde—William Empson analyzed "The Windhover" in "Seven Types of Ambiguity"—and to the common reader in search of spiritual sustenance.

Yet it is also possible to read Hopkins's passage from observation to celebration, in these and other poems, as an anxious and overinsistent one. The world the poet sees is beautiful, so much so that "The heart rears wings bold and bolder / And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off under his feet." But the priest is always concerned that this love of nature might turn into pantheism, that we might forget the Creator in the creation. That is why, in "God's Grandeur," Hopkins moves directly from praise to chastisement: "Why do men then now not reck his rod?" In "The Starlight Night," he magically evokes the stars—"The bright boroughs, the circle-citadels there!"—before reminding us that the heavens are not Heaven: "Ah well! it is all a purchase, all is a prize," which we must buy with "Prayer, patience, alms, vows."

This kind of scolding becomes most troubling in the late poem "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves." This is one of Hopkins's most formally adventurous works, but also one of his most bleakly Manichaean. The poet who once gave glory to God for dappled things now surveys the earth at night, when "her dapple is at an end." As at the End of Days, there is nothing left but black and white, good and evil:

Let life, waned, ah let life wind
Off her once skeined stained veined variety upon, all on two spools; part, pen, pack
Now her all in two flocks, two folds—black, white; right, wrong.

For the poet, life is multiple, pied and dappled, endlessly various and alluring; for the priest, life is dualistic, the stage on which good and evil do combat for our eternal soul. Ultimately, Hopkins has no doubt which of these visions must prevail: the poem ends by invoking the "rack" where "thoughts in groans grind," the punishment awaiting the damned.

Hopkins, of course, believed quite literally in Hell. Mariani quotes the sermon on this subject which he delivered in 1882, and it is as cruel and brutal as the famous hellfire sermon in "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man." After reminding his parishioners that "there are dangers by land and sea, wrecks, railway accidents, lightning, mischances with machinery, fires, falls; there are murders," Hopkins goes on to evoke Hell as "the brimstone, the dregs and bilge-water of that pit," where the sinner's lusts become "like vomit and like dung." The odd echo of his own style in "mischances with machinery, fires, falls" only drives home the disparity between what Hopkins felt about the world and what he believed about it.

"We're isolating the obesity gene, but only to make fun of it."

Hopkins was aware of the gulf between his artistic vision and his religious one, and of its costs. That is why he was so ambivalent about writing and publishing his poetry, to an extent that seemed masochistic to his friends. Dixon, a poet who was also an Anglican priest, urged Hopkins to consider his poetry in the light that Caedmon did: "I . . . am certain that as a means of serving . . . religion, you cannot have a more powerful instrument than your own verses." But Hopkins insisted that to write at all was, if not a sin, at least a reprehensible frivolity. He regretted "the waste of time the very compositions you admire may have caused and their preoccupation of the mind which belonged to more sacred or more binding duties . . . the disquiet and the thoughts of vainglory they have given rise to."

It is strange to hear Hopkins describe his poems, which posterity regards as not only great but agents of grace, as a "waste of time." Mariani writes, "There is something in Hopkins that keeps fighting his own extraordinary creativity, keeping it under an adamantine compression so intense that it has even affected his physical well-being." But he does not want to acknowledge that the "something" that made Hopkins unhappy was his religion—or, more precisely, the self-tormenting spirit in which he approached his religion.

What would a Hopkins freed of that torment look like? He offers an answer in one of his most celebrated letters. In 1882, he sent "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" to Bridges, who responded that the poem reminded him of Walt Whitman. "I believe that you are quite mistaken about this piece," Hopkins replied. "But . . . I may as well say what I should not otherwise have said, that I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any other man's living. As he is a very great scoundrel this is not a pleasant confession."

Today, when readers of poetry are used to a much wider range of experiment than Bridges was, it is indeed hard to hear much similarity between Hopkins's supercharged rhythms and Whitman's psalmlike expansiveness. Yet Hopkins showed amazing insight into his own gift when he made the comparison. For Whitman is the poet closest to Hopkins in his intoxication with the created world, in his erotic openness to sense experience. One can almost imagine Hopkins writing certain lines from "Song of Myself": "Hefts of the moving world at innocent gambols, silently rising, freshly exuding, / Scooting obliquely high and low." But Hopkins could never have affirmed the world as Whitman does:

> There was never any more inception than
>   there is now,
> Nor any more youth or age than there is
>   now;
> And will never be any more perfection
>   than there is now,
> Nor any more heaven or hell than there is
>   now.

For Hopkins, the shadows of Heaven and Hell always hung over the now. Whether it was his faith that so darkened his world, or whether it was the experience of darkness that led him to faith, is as impossible to decide in his case as in any other. Either way, his desire was not, like Whitman, to celebrate himself and sing himself but to imitate Christ as far as he could or dared. His great success is apparent from the way he described Jesus' "career," in a passage that trembles blasphemously on the verge of autobiography:

"Above all Christ our Lord: his career was cut short and, whereas he would have wished to succeed by success—for it is insane to lay yourself out for failure . . . nevertheless he was doomed to succeed by failure; his plans were baffled, his hopes dashed, and his work was done by being broken off undone. However much he understood all this he found it an intolerable grief to submit to it. He left the example: it is very strengthening, but except in that sense it is not consoling." ♦

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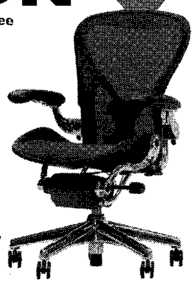

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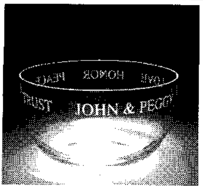

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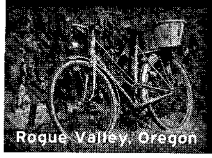

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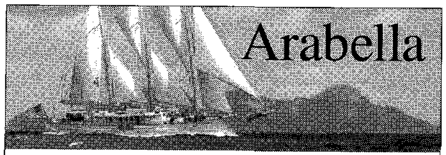

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THE THEATRE

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Eugene O'Neill on love triangles.

BY HILTON ALS

By the time "Desire Under the Elms" opened on Broadway, in 1925, Eugene O'Neill had already written a number of full-length plays that drew on his fascination with, and abhorrence of, female sexual power, particularly as it is used to drive men apart. In "Beyond the Horizon" (1920), for instance, a woman pits two brothers against each other as they compete for her love. When the more poetic-minded brother dies of consumption, the woman descends into selfish hysteria. For this Strindbergian exercise, O'Neill was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. He won it again two years later for "Anna Christie," a slightly crude but effective drama about a former prostitute, raped as a teen-ager, who finds a fiancé and her long-lost father at the same time. O'Neill's interest here lies not in Anna's bitter past but in the two men's reactions to it. In 1924, O'Neill expanded his interest in love triangles with "All God's Chillun Got Wings," a play in which race is the third member of a marriage undone by the strain of miscegenation.

But, no matter what metaphor he chose for it in his work, in life O'Neill seemed to think of himself as a constant fifth wheel—an outsider in his relationships. He married three times, and in one notable affair, fictionalized in the 1981 movie "Reds," he fell for the writer Louise Bryant, who was already involved with the journalist John Reed. (The affair continued after Bryant and Reed were married.) Perennially wounded and self-absorbed, O'Neill seemed both unable to abide subjugation to a woman and unable to live without it. The pain of unrequited love gave his work meaning.

It is apt, then, that the most powerful character at the beginning of "Desire Under the Elms" (at the St. James) is the ultimate unattainable woman: a dead mother. She's the only person that the hero, Eben Cabot (Pablo Schreiber), truly pines for. Eben's grief is exacerbated by the man he holds responsible for his mother's death: his father, Ephraim (Brian Dennehy), who treated her pretty much like chattel. On the other hand, that is how Ephraim treats everyone, including his two sons from a previous marriage, Simeon (Daniel Stewart Sherman) and Peter (Boris McGiver), who are required to carry more than their weight on his New England farm, circa 1850. Eben is now the only "woman" in the house; he wears his mother's apron to cook for his brothers and keeps her parlor intact with a Norman Bates-like fetishism.

Because the director, Robert Falls, is interested in lifting O'Neill above his bathos, he ignores the script's overly determined, borderline misogynistic stage directions ("Two enormous elms are on each side of the house. . . . There is a sinister maternity in their aspect. . . . They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingles") and sets the play in what feels like an underwater world. Working with the gifted Walt Spangler—whose sense of scale reminds one of Gordon Craig's groundbreaking scenic design—and Michael Philippi, who draws a kind of charcoal light over Spangler's worn, subterranean surfaces, Falls opens the production in silence. We see the two older brothers carting stones across the murky landscape. Then we watch as Peter removes the entrails of a pig—the landscape can yield only blood, which is one reason that the brothers soon head for California.

While Falls makes exceptionally strong theatre, this production at times teeters on the edge of another kind of bathos—albeit a postmodernist one. Falls intends to get to O'Neill's essence. The language matters less to him than the master's underlying intentions, and he has cut the play from three acts to one, eliminating both intermissions. For the most part, this is helpful; Falls's script is tighter and clearer than O'Neill's, more openly erotic, and less biased against the character of Abbie (Carla Gugino), the new bride whom Ephraim brings home, and whom Eben takes to and against from the first. It's a measure of Falls's inventiveness as a director that Abbie and Eben's desire for each other is rarely spoken. We watch the daily life of the three characters—Eben, Abbie, and Ephraim—develop to the strains of Bob Dylan's "Not Dark Yet." And when the inevitable happens—Eben and Abbie consummate their passion, thus entering the "hopeless hope" that O'Neill claimed as the credo of many of his characters—we can barely stand the suspense. What will happen to them? And to us? This is theatre that is *meant* to affect us and—old-fashioned as the concept may be—provide some sort of catharsis in the bargain.

Carla Gugino and Pablo Schreiber as hopeless lovers in O'Neill's "Desire Under the Elms." Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

Schreiber and Gugino are both that rare combination, actors who are stars. Separately, they have spun poetry in the most literal-minded of mediums: television. Schreiber brought a working-class sexiness to the role of a dockworker on "The Wire"; his attention to detail was reminiscent of Marlon Brando's in the quieter scenes of "On the Waterfront"—in the scene where he picks up Eva Marie Saint's glove and dusts it off, for instance. And Gugino, as a Hollywood agent on "Entourage," met a high-powered client's evasions and narcissism with something harder: a contained, undemonstrative self-interest. But Gugino excels at communicating physical desperation, too. (This was evident in her brilliant portrayal of Maggie in the 2004 Broadway production of Arthur Miller's "After the Fall," and of Catharine Holly in the 2006 revival of Tennessee Williams's "Suddenly Last Summer.") Gugino's Abbie means to make Eben her own. She makes love to him in his mother's sacred parlor; she even commits murder—less for Eben than in defense of the toxic love that feeds her. She resents Eben for returning her to the world of passion—she wanted domesticity, a home, his *mother's* home. And yet she cannot hold back. She hates his male ability to disengage when things get complicated. While watching Gugino's pretty, deceitful, lonely heroine bring down the house she so longed for, I thought of the imperious and beautiful Carlotta Monterey, O'Neill's last wife. After he married Monterey, in 1929, O'Neill was no longer the outcast third member of a triangle. Monterey, a former actress, knew how to love and torture and deceive him just enough to keep him writing about the same woman over and over again. ♦

POP MUSIC

BOYS' CHOIR

Songs that make themselves giddy.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Grizzly Bear, a four-piece band from Brooklyn, arranges its songs so carefully that they accrue intricate, hairline detail with no loss of momentum, but the group's most obvious gift is the vocals—all four members sing, and well. The band's founder, Ed Droste, has a creamy tenor that favors a clean midrange and slides into a falsetto without splintering. Daniel Rossen, one of the band's main songwriters (the other is Droste), has a glassy tenor that begins as a quiver and grows bright and loud as it rises. The drummer, Chris Bear (his given name), and the bassist, Chris Taylor, tend to keep their voices in the upper ranges. When all four band members harmonize, Grizzly Bear sounds like a boys' choir.

This kind of harmony has its roots in the multitrack backing vocals that Brian Wilson produced on Beach Boys records like "Smile" and "Pet Sounds," but it could just as easily be drawing on forms of American church music and on modern classical composers like John Tavener. Within the genre of indie rock, the move toward more singing done by more voices in a more articulated harmonic framework began somewhere in the early aughts, with artists like Sufjan Stevens, who became known for records like "Greetings from Michigan" (2003) and "Illinoise" (2005); both feature elevated, multilayered vocals. (His 2006 collection "Songs for Christmas" dramatically altered the well-known harmonies of Christmas carols.) In the past several years, St. Vincent, Fleet Foxes, Bon Iver, and Beach House, among others, have found vitality in massed vocal arrangements that sometimes have little to do with rock, and even less to do with a masculine rock voice. It doesn't matter much now whether a man or a woman is singing—these voices linger way above the bass range. Hip-hop has made way for a rebirth of the disco that predated it; now indie rock has found inspiration in music that was made long before the punk records that constitute the genre's starting point.

In 2003, Ed Droste began recording alone in his Brooklyn bedroom. He recorded thirty-five songs in the course of fifteen months, fourteen of which formed "Horn of Plenty," his

Making it easy: Grizzly Bear's Chris Bear, Daniel Rossen, Ed Droste, and Chris Taylor. Photograph by Lane Coder.

2004 début full-length album, which he released under the name Grizzly Bear. (Chris Bear added drums to a few of the tracks.) At this point, Droste's songwriting style tended more toward creating colorful atmospheres than toward producing fully formed songs, and his engineering skills weren't equal to either the quality of his own instrument or to Bear's precise, fluid drumming. (It is indicative of Bear's skill that he played straight-up classic seventies rock with the Brooklyn trio Earl Greyhound, from 2003 to 2005. Greyhound and Grizzly Bear are like the Oscar Madison and Felix Ungar of Brooklyn rock—one broad and booming, the other delicate and precise.)

In 2004, Bear introduced Droste to Taylor and Rossen, both former classmates of Bear's from N.Y.U., and Grizzly Bear became a band. Taylor plays bass guitar and a variety of woodwinds, and now engineers the band's albums. Rossen added a second lead vocal, a more elaborate style of guitar playing, and a pleasantly cold sensibility. Droste's lyrics touch on themes of domesticity—"Five years, countless months, and a loan. Hope I'm ready, able to make my own, good home"—and his warmed-up melodies sound like a cross between a sixties girl group and the songbook of a very stylish church camp. Rossen is less likely to play nice; he's the only one in the band who would sing a line as dismissive as "All your useless pretensions are weighing on my time."

The first real Grizzly Bear album, "Yellow House" (2006), was recorded at Droste's mother's residence, in Watertown, Massachusetts. The house is, indeed, yellow (and Droste's great-grandmother's Steinway, which the group used on the album, is turquoise). The influence of Droste's family background extends beyond mere ambience—the waltzing piano chords at the center of "Marla" were originally written in the thirties by Droste's great-aunt Marla, whom he once described as "a failed musician who lived in New York and drank herself to death." Better still, Droste is distantly related to the co-founder of the Hooters restaurant chain, perhaps the only cultural event more distant from Grizzly Bear than classic seventies rock.

The songs on "Yellow House" are interconnected and full of audible air. They seem to glow from within, as though the electricity had gone out and the house were lit only by candles. It was my default album for 2006, never polite and never annoying, even when the songs are roughened up with clatter and howls. That's the Grizzly Bear trick: despite the complexity of its arrangements, none of what the band does feels precious or forced.

"Knife," the album's best-known track, dominated the music blogs that year. The song has a great opening, reminiscent of John Lennon's intake of breath before the chorus of the Beatles' "Girl." Droste drags his pick across the strings of his Telecaster and plays the first B chord a tiny bit slower than the song's languid tempo, moving like a car coughing to life, or someone rising to his feet reluctantly. Droste's singing is warm and sleepy, as if nothing could go wrong, while the lyrics describe a situation where nothing goes right: "I want you to know, when I look in your eyes, with every blow comes another lie." The singing could be the original vocal take from a Phil Spector B-side, but slowed way down; the band surrounds it with a stream of high noises—the feedback of guitars, voices straining, synthesizers droning—that fight the sweetness of the vocal. The wordless "oh, oh, oh," passage sung by Droste is tailed by a corps of weird electronically altered voices. When Droste plays three fuzzy sustained chords and sings the chorus—"Can't you feel the knife?"—several woodwinds play in unison with the guitar and bass notes, making a familiar sound soft and unfamiliar. All of a sudden, the backing vocals are bleeding in from above, like the tub upstairs overflowing. Rossen described "Yellow House" to me as an "anxious cloud," and that description fits "Knife" well, though the song is as blissful as it is disorienting. (A triple-espresso-and-two-Xanax cloud, then.) The more you notice things—was that guitar figure like a bit of actual country music?—the more you wonder how much you're missing.

If "Yellow House" was a respite, a quiet, single-story structure, the band's new album, "Veckatimest," is a sprawling water park, sending you through different sluices and dropping you from pools down into slides that give onto small lakes. The album is named for an island off the coast of Cape Cod. "We got really into the topography of the region and have fond memories of rehearsing there," Droste explained. Like Sonic Youth's "Sister" and Radiohead's "Amnesiac," "Veckatimest" captures a band in full, collaborative density.

The second track, "Two Weeks," is a big fat ice-cream cone of a song. The piano part sounds a little like "Chopsticks" expanded into something more robust, with Bear merging a shuffle and a straightforward backbeat as the boys sing "Oh-ooh-oh" up into the air—a doo-wop quartet launching into orbit. Droste sings about a "routine malaise" but pledges, "I told you I would stay." The voices rise higher, as though the song were making itself giddy, and Droste follows his promise with a plea for what Mary J. Blige called "no more drama": "Would you always, maybe sometimes, make it easy? Take your time." It's an awfully sweet way of telling someone to calm the hell down.

What's so enjoyable about "Veckatimest" is how wide an arc it swings after "Two Weeks." The band wants to unfurl in every direction, and does. The browniest track, "Fine for Now," starts with a gentle a-cappella vocal, the band at its most churchy, and then builds into a whorl of noise, Bear treating his ride cymbal mercilessly, and sounding more than a little like Elvin Jones. The effortless ballad "Foreground" manages to sink fully into its own honey without disappearing. With only a hint of timekeeping drums, Droste sings in his falsetto above a piano ostinato and the quietest distorted guitar of the year. The hiss and murk from "Horn of Plenty" is now entirely gone. The fog has lifted and now we can see an entire city, not just a house. ♦

BLOCK THAT METAPHOR!

From an Op-Ed piece in the Times about the Bush Administration's stance on the nuclear capability of Iran.

This is a slam-dunk reversal, admitting error. Now, when they play poker, they show their hands to each other, so they don't get another curveball.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

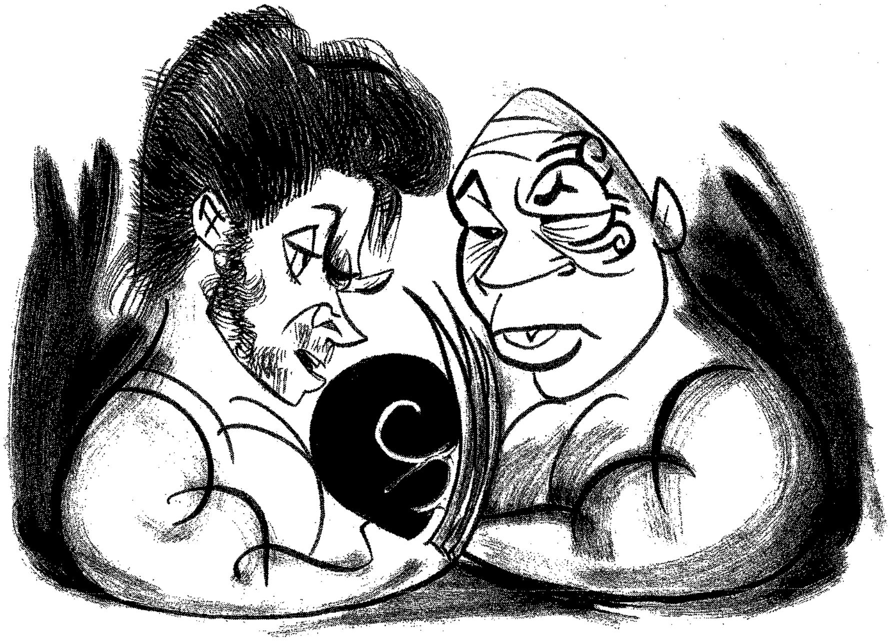
HARD KNOCKS

"X-Men Origins: Wolverine," "Fighting," "Tyson."

BY DAVID DENBY

Violence (not sex) is the bedrock of international mass culture—violent aggression as joyfully dispensed by the male body, whether sheathed (Spider-Man), tuxedoed (Bond), cool in black (Bourne), shirtless (Sylvester Stallone), hairless (Vin Diesel), or naked (Arnold Schwarzenegger and now Hugh Jackman). Two new summer-season fictions and a brilliant new documentary fuel our endless desire to see prowess so devastating that it transforms mere force into iconography and fighting into epic struggle. In the noisy "X-Men Origins: Wolverine," two warring mutant brothers, Liev Schreiber, a morose sadist with fangs, and Hugh Jackman, unhappy but ripped, fly at each other again and again, grappling, punching, slashing. Alas, there's nothing quite memorable here: much of the combat is just a whirl of movement photographed up close. As the "X-Men" series has progressed, the startling poetic extravagances of the first film have given way to flesh-pounding clumsiness; the men might be two Humvees at war.

The director, Gavin Hood ("Rendition"), has mastered a standard vocabulary of digital effects, including the inescapable scene of men crashing through a window, and has added faintly ridiculous new feats, such as Jackman's leaping onto an airborne helicopter and shearing off the blades with the cutlery springing from his fists. Wolverine, it turns out, is using expanded powers. In this prequel to the series, Wolverine, né Logan (Jackman), after fighting for more than a century, in every known war, retires to the tranquil ecstasy of life in the Canadian Rockies. But the devious Colonel Stryker (Danny Huston), claiming that he can make him indestructible, searches him out, dips him in a glass laboratory bathtub, and injects a substance called adamantium into his veins, his bones, and his organs. Naked, a buff Frankenstein's monster, Wolverine escapes, and Stryker tries to hunt him down. But this act makes little sense, since the Colonel has just created the superhero anew. The story, devised by David Benioff and Skip Woods, is largely meaningless, and the emotions are no more than functional—they set up the next fight. Schreiber and Jackman maul each other, but, since no one will die, there's not much suspense about the outcome of any given battle. As we now know, the point of these unresolved struggles is to prepare the way not just for the next fight but, inevitably and a little cynically, for the next movie.



Men of violence: Hugh Jackman's Wolverine takes on Iron Mike.

TOM BACHTELL

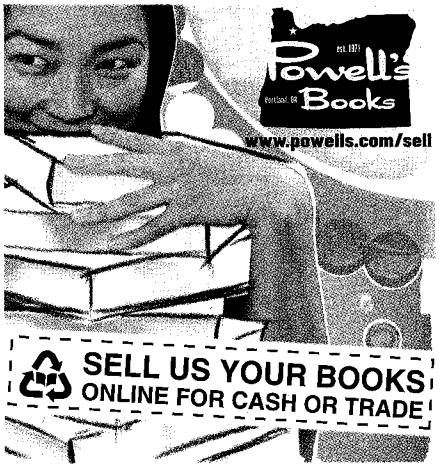
I was a little surprised to hear that "Fighting" had received a rating of PG-13. A movie devoted to the sullen art of bare-knuckle boxing in New York—scratch-and-claw combat without rules—approved for young adults and kids? How do you pull that off? As it turns out, "Fighting" holds back from the brutality of its subject. The movie's language is chaste, and although the fights, staged in alleyways, back rooms, and buildings under construction, may look violent at first glance, the actual blows and the pain of battle are either hidden by tricky editing or just ignored. The hero, Shawn MacArthur (Channing Tatum), after being thrown to the pavement or a marble floor and flung against whatever furniture happens to be around, shows up the next day with no more than a few decorative bruises on his face. (I've looked worse after slipping in the tub.) Tatum, a tall, lean, abs-enhanced former model, makes Shawn an awfully nice fellow—a mass of gentle, hurting, inarticulate impulses. The movie seems calculated to appeal not just to teen-age boys but to teen-age girls, too, which would be fine if the hero snarled a bit—if he weren't set up so unconvincingly as a polite, diffident country boy, tough in a fight but a complete sweetie when he talks to the vulnerable young single mother (Zulay Henao) he falls for. Channing Tatum has more grit than such other angel-faced actors as Orlando Bloom, Zac Efron, and the goofy Ashton Kutcher, but, at the moment, he seems like a greater Josh Hartnett rather than a lesser Paul Newman.

Yet, even if the movie is a fake as a fight picture, it's still a decent commercial entertainment. The independent film director Dito Montiel ("A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints"), who wrote "Fighting" with Robert Munic, is from New York, and he has a feel for the hostile atmosphere of the after-hours city: the plug-ugly types lounging outside a crooked convenience store;

the fey, knowing sarcasm of professional gamblers, particularly the money man played by Roger Guenveur Smith, who mouths each word as if it were so precious that he didn't want to let it go. There's life in this corrupt night world—Montiel is alert to the avidity of a bored fight crowd waiting for something dirty to happen. He's no Scorsese, but he roughens the surface of his scenes, letting characters interrupt and talk over one another. He also gets an interesting performance out of Terrence Howard, as a saddened, philosophical hustler named Harvey Boarden, a gent who barely survives in the urban muck. Harvey knows the gamblers, the limo drivers, the enforcers, but he's not ruthless enough for his chosen milieu; he likes peace and quiet around him, a proper level of civilization no matter how rough the game. Howard softens his voice—he almost croons—and his Harvey moves catlike through the city, attended by a posse of boys who run errands for him. He forms a partnership with Shawn in the hope that the big kid will become his meal ticket. As the stakes get higher and higher (winner takes all), Shawn fights a series of murderous-looking men, including a Russian bruiser, a Korean kick-boxer, and a nasty rival (Brian White) from his past. The fights may not be very convincing, but the story's underdog structure is satisfying in a happy-cliché sort of way. "Fighting" is "Rocky" without the bombast, "Fight Club" without the daft metaphysical pretensions. Lonely and broke, the hero works out in an empty subway car in the middle of the night. New Yorkers who would never attend a bare-knuckle shindy can easily identify with his determination to lick this city one way or another.

The spectacle of a savage fight, however ineptly done or digitally enhanced, brings one back to a climactic moment in James Toback's documentary "Tyson," a portrait of a boxer once advertised as "the baddest man on the planet." It was in November, 1996, that Mike Tyson, then the W.B.A. heavyweight champion, got head-butted by the challenger, Evander Holyfield—a blow that opened a cut over Tyson's eye and led to a T.K.O. victory for Holyfield. My inexpert view is that the head-butt was accidental. But, seven months later, the men fought again, and Holyfield, the taller of the two, leaned over and head-butted Tyson once more. It all happened very quickly, but this time to me the act looked calculated. Tyson certainly thought so, and famously and disastrously went berserk, biting Holyfield first on one ear and then on the other, losing the match, his boxing license, and three million dollars in fines. Confirming the reputation as a semi-psychotic thug he had earned a few years earlier, with a conviction for rape, Tyson hurled himself farther down a spiral of disgrace from which he has never recovered. He behaved abominably—it was an iconic moment in all the wrong ways. At the time, however, the extreme contempt that many sportswriters and fans poured on him felt a little disingenuous. Professional boxing is defined by an elaborate set of regulations and traditions designed to channel violence into craft, aggression into honor. Tyson, flouting all these protocols and baring his teeth in an act that evoked cannibalism, demonstrated what the sport was really about for him—dominance, pain, and survival. Caught up in his own sense of betrayal (the referees didn't call a foul against Holyfield in either fight), he inadvertently reminded many people of something that they may not have been eager to admit—that they were drawn to the game in the first place by the spectacle of blood. Movies aestheticize violence; an actual fight brings out the desire to see men destroy each other. Perhaps we moviegoers, relishing violence, occasionally need to see how crazy the real thing can be.

Those who were furious at Tyson will be made even angrier by Toback's film, for here is a fresh provocation—an attempt to restore to Tyson the human dimensions that have been taken from him (by himself, of course, as well as by others). The movie makes it clear that, for all his snarls and outbursts, he is intelligent, candid, and easily wounded; that he is by turns inordinately proud and inordinately ashamed and, above all, intensely curious about himself, as if his own nature were a mystery that had not yet been solved. Out of shape, his face bizarrely marked by the tentacle-like tattoos of a Maori warrior, Tyson was forty when the movie was shot, two years ago, mostly in the luxurious white living room of a house in Los Angeles that was rented for the occasion. In between footage of his fights, he looks directly into the camera, in tight closeup, or is photographed from the side, also very



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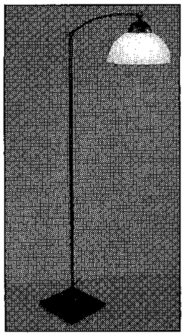

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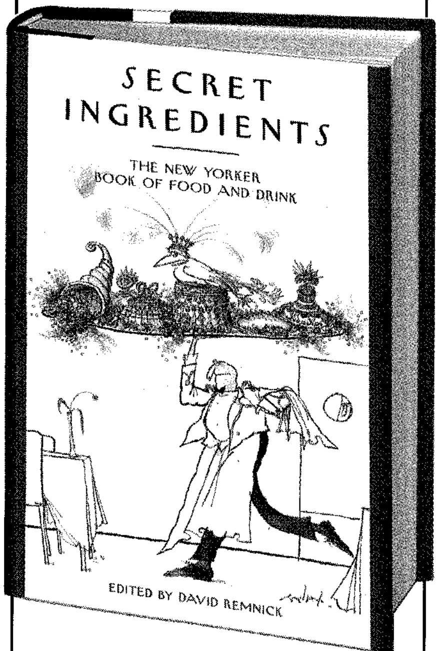

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close, a Cubist approach to portraiture that suggests a complicated man trying to express warring impulses. Some of these contradictions are funny, as when Tyson says that he now wants a strong woman, very strong, a C.E.O. type—"and then I want to dominate her sexually." Even at bay, he must conquer in all things.

Toback, having known Tyson for years, may have helped him shape his memories into a menacing American fable. Fatherless, his mother an alcoholic, Tyson grew up in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, a fat kid with a high, lisping voice who was an easy mark for vicious older boys. As a kind of revenge, he became a baby gangster who robbed drug dealers. In detention in upstate New York, he passed into the hands of Bobby Stewart, a retired fighter, who sent him, at the age of fourteen, to the great trainer Cus D'Amato. D'Amato both indulged him as a lawless teen and disciplined him as a fighter, and he inculcated in him the D'Amato doctrine, a way of transforming anger into a relentless attack, in which speed and strength—a hail of full-power punches—drive through an opponent's defenses. As Tyson tells it, his old humiliations fuelled the strategy. Before a fight, he was frightened of losing, but, as he approached the ring, fear would ebb. In the movie's most powerful sequence, we hear Tyson narrate his fear-management ritual as he climbs into the ring, his pupils darting this way and that, following an opponent's movements. The death's-head face he presented to the other fighter—cobra eyes and flattened cheekbones—was a mask designed to intimidate. He bore in, and the men collapsed like stunned cattle, often in the first or second round.

Perhaps Tyson was fortunate to have avoided school and society, inasmuch as his grim early years were the only background that could have produced the inexorable force that he became. What this early life couldn't do, however, was protect him from the many dangers outside the ring. Without the guidance of D'Amato (who died when Tyson was nineteen), he fell among idolaters and users, and blew tens of millions of dollars, as he admits, on houses, cars, clothes, girls, drugs, parties, every kind of excess, to the point where the man who was once the wealthiest fighter in history winds up beached (literally—Toback photographs him facing the sea), stranded amid debts and visits to rehab clinics. In that long descent, Tyson acted out his sense of worthlessness. If he cannot be king, he will be nothing; the middle, he says, doesn't suit his temperament. What he offers Toback's camera now is savagery recollected in tranquillity—the baddest man becalmed into a state of articulate self-awareness. That victory, at least, no one can take away from him. ♦

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The Front Row, a blog about movies.

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VOLUME LXXXV, NO. 13, May 11, 2009. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 9 & 16, June 8 & 15, July 6 & 13, August 10 & 17, and December 21 & 28) by Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Elizabeth Hughes, vice-president and publisher; Beth Lusko, associate publisher advertising; Anjali Saigal, associate publisher marketing services; James Guilfoyle, director of finance and business operations; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Condé Nast Publications: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Jennifer Graham, senior vice-president-finance; Jill Bright, executive vice-president/human resources. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001. Canada Post: return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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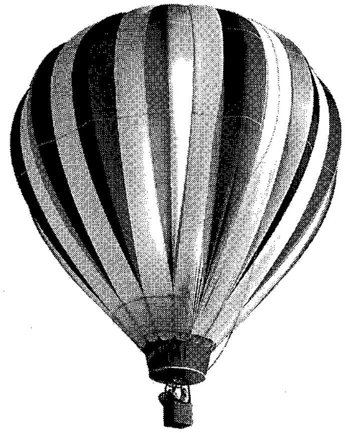

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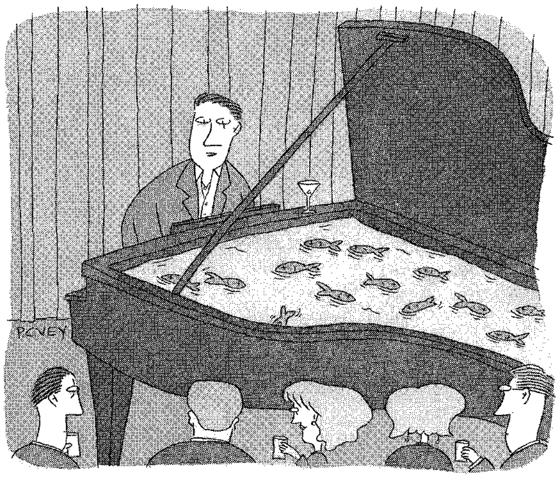
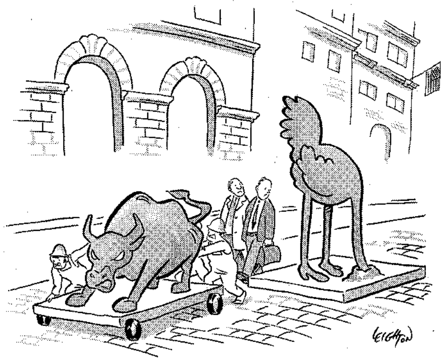
Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Jack Ziegler, must be received by Sunday, May 10th. Finalists in the April 27th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the May 25th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"This song goes out to the one that got away."
Elisa Narsu, Basking Ridge, N.J.



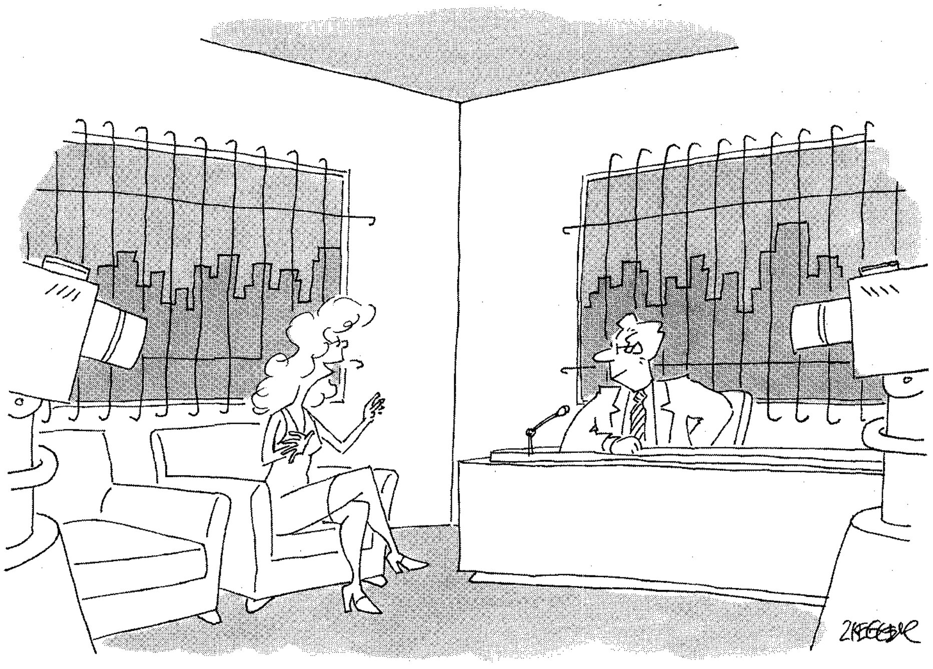
THE FINALISTS

"If we just ignore it, maybe it'll go away."
Lance Massey, Bowling Green, Ohio

"The statue of the lemmings was just too depressing."
Andrew Mann, San Francisco, Calif.

"I think the head's in the wrong place."
Steve Punch, Danville, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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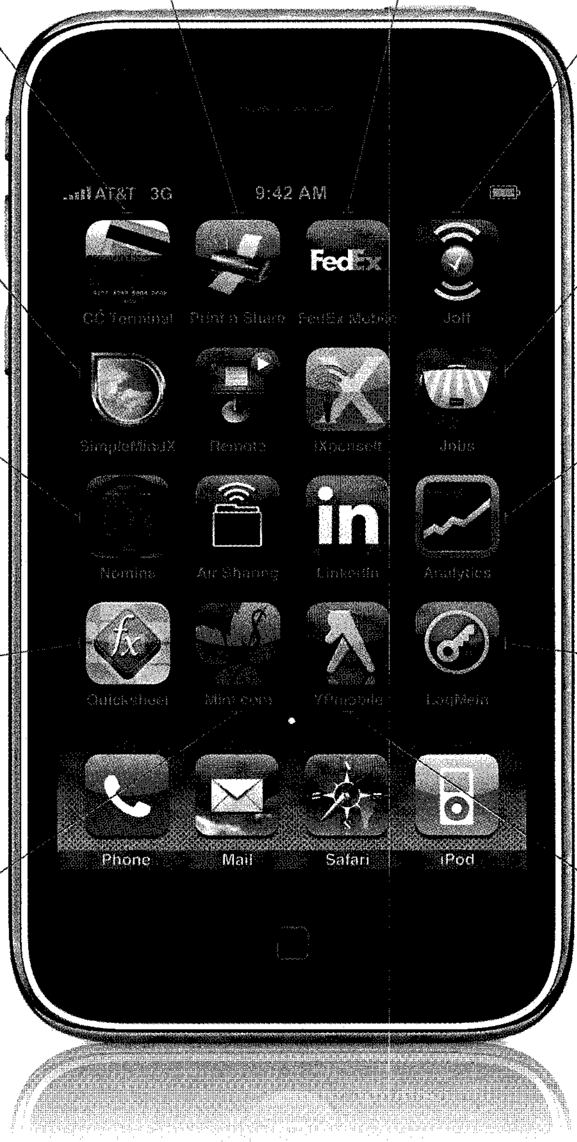

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